

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 23 September 2004

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 23 September 2004

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

Sporting Scotland

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1733, in the name of Frank McAveety, under the title of A Sporting Scotland is a Successful Scotland, and three amendments to the motion.

09:30

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): In opening, I would like to welcome Michael Matheson to his front-bench role within the Scottish National Party. I look forward to constructive dialogue with Michael on many of the key areas that we share in our portfolios. I hope that together—and with others in the chamber—we can continue the development in sporting activity that all Scotland has had in the five years since devolution.

This debate is appropriate, given the success that our major athletes have had in the past few months—both the athletes who were at the Olympics and the athletes who are at present doing incredibly well at the Athens paralympics. In many other sports, many people have represented their country either as individuals or as part of a team and made a substantial contribution. From those successes, we can get a sense not only of exhilaration but of the role that sport can play in building a nation's self-confidence and boosting the self-esteem and health of our people.

This morning, I want to talk about what the Executive has been trying to achieve over the past five years and about our ambitions for the future. We regard sport as central to much of the improvement agenda that the First Minister spoke about in his opening remarks in the new chamber only a couple of weeks ago.

How do we use sport to maximise the nation's opportunities? How can we celebrate success and increase participation and involvement? In our sport 21 strategy, a key challenge—outlined in "Shaping Scotland's Future"—is to ensure that we have the ambition to ensure not only medal success at the very top level, both for individuals and for teams, but wider participation in sport. We want to celebrate our medal winners at the Olympics and at the paralympics, but we also want to increase the player base. Evidence from our

major reviews of sport across Scotland has shown a diminution in the number of activities and the number of participants. The youth football review showed that there was significant participation up to the age of 18 but a substantial drop-off after the age of 18. In rugby, we have an opportunity to address ways of increasing participation. In general, increasing our playing base will be important.

One of the most substantial contributions to the debate was made just before the summer recess by Peter Peacock, the Minister for Education and Young People, when he announced his response to the recommendations of the physical education review group. That group made a number of key recommendations, building on many of Parliament's previous debates during its first four years. It was recognised that physical activity should be more central to the curriculum at primary and secondary level. Peter Peacock has gone further than the recommendations of the review group; I will explain the detail later.

We also have investment in the active schools programme—a substantial commitment, over three years, of £24 million. We want to pull together a whole range of activities. Whether people are playing sport for fun and enjoyment, or whether they are playing sport for competitive engagement or professional and elite development, they will have opportunities through the active schools programme.

Another ambition announced over the recess was to do with the development of the national and regional sport facilities strategy. I know that parts of Scotland were not included in that announcement, because of the ways in which partnerships have developed. However, I assure members that some of the money for the Euro 2008 bid—unsuccessful though it eventually was—has been put aside to ensure that we have capital that will, we hope, lever in more substantial resources. If all the partnership bids progress as we hope they can, we will have more than £250 million of major new facility development at national and regional level. I continue to be in discussion with people in all parts of Scotland to address their concerns.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In light of the minister's comments on facilities, will he confirm that he has been asked to consider what facilities might be available in the Dunfermline area, and will he confirm that he has not ruled any of the proposals out?

Mr McAveety: I assure the member that, alongside the sports facilities strategy, we would like further development opportunities for a number of other areas of Scotland. Obviously, Fife is one of those areas. Key officials in sportscotland will be exploring options not only in the

Dunfermline area but in other parts of Scotland. They will want to enhance the quality of sports facilities. I have met representatives of Dunfermline Athletic Football Club, and the supporters association, to consider ways of developing sports there.

We are engaging in a range of things that can make a genuine difference. We have to ask how we can deliver on the challenging ambitions of sport 21. The implementation forum pulls together a number of key individuals and organisations in sports in Scotland—including the governing bodies and representatives from local authorities and voluntary organisations. A key challenge will be to develop partnerships so that we can make a real difference.

One of the most positive developments that I have seen recently is to do with the club development strategy. A key question from the consultation on sport 21, and from many of my deliberations as minister, concerns how we can link community clubs and get them involved in the wider development of what happens in school and after school. We have to find ways of using local facilities. We have to ask how we can develop participation in clubs and how we can get that participation to continue beyond the teenage years and into adult and family lifestyles. We want everyone to participate in sport.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): The minister has spoken about the link between sport for children in schools and sport in sports clubs. Will he confirm that the role of establishing that link—which was previously given to sports co-ordinators—has fallen by the wayside? Sports co-ordinators are concentrating more on interschool competitions, rather than investigating routes into post-school participation.

Mr McAveety: I assure Margo MacDonald that co-ordinators can do all those things; they can work on integration and participation and they can work alongside schools to increase their range of programmes and increase their facilities. Sports co-ordinators can provide an effective link in all local authorities, encouraging departments to think imaginatively about their needs. The co-ordinators can also work effectively in club development.

I visited Kilwinning Community Sports Club this week. The club is only a couple of years old. It grew out of a basic ambition, when a number of competitive sports teams, operating out of rundown and poor-quality facilities, realised that they wanted to develop. They became a co-ordinated club and worked out what estate they needed. The club then applied to a series of funding bodies. This week, we were given a tremendous presentation by the sports club, which had identified the need for money from Communities Scotland, from the health budget,

from the local authority and from sportscotland. By pulling that together, the club has a greater ambition, and we have a sports club that started as a football club but is now providing a clubgolf programme for most of the schools in the Kilwinning area. It is providing qualifications for its coaches in various sports, and it is considering rugby coaching and other aspects of fitness, such as weightlifting.

A major commitment is involved, but behind that there is an opportunity to provide employment in an area of disadvantage. The club is only two or three years old, but it has an ambition to raise its game and to do something genuinely different in the wider community. That is complemented by the rates relief that clubs that are registered as community amateur sports clubs can receive as a result of a voluntary agreement with local authorities and the Inland Revenue. There is a good model there, which started halfway through the previous parliamentary session and has now delivered something. However, the club has great ambitions to enhance its role even further.

The importance of developing potential is central to the Executive's ambitions for sports development in Scotland. That sporting potential can be developed only if we encourage and work effectively with the volunteers, and perhaps enhance what they do. That is why sportscotland intends to appoint six regional volunteer development officers this year, who will sit within the local volunteer networks to try to support the existing volunteer structure for clubs and increase the capacity of those clubs to develop. We have a major ambition to raise the numbers of individuals involved in volunteering.

We hope that all that will lead to excellence, both at a local level, where people participate better than they have participated before, and at the elite level, where we will ensure that there are substantial developments for our best athletes. Last year, I announced lottery investment of £16 million over four years, to continue the work of the Scottish Institute of Sport, which was started in 1998, under my predecessor, Sam Galbraith. That is a commitment to working with athletes to ensure that they can compete at the top level. The institute has had some successes; most recently, 35 of its athletes were selected to represent Britain at the Olympics and the paralympics. Along with the five other Scots in team GB, they have enjoyed some medal successes. Only a few weeks ago, those successful athletes were celebrated in the capital city, and were recognised at a reception at Bute House. It was interesting to note that they were fairly modest about their achievements. The influence they had on many of the youngsters who watched them or spoke to them that day will inspire those youngsters for the future.

We have had some successes and we want that to continue. There have been some tremendous successes in the paralympics. Hopefully, over the weekend, I will have a chance to meet some of our successful athletes. Great Britain got off to a great start with the young cyclist Aileen McGlynn from Glasgow, and her pilot Ellen Hunter, who won gold in the women's B1-3 tandem time trial. In doing so, the pair smashed the world record on their paralympic games debut. We also had success when Isabel Newstead retained her air pistol title to win her ninth paralympic gold medal in her seventh paralympic games. Isabel is a unique athlete, who deserves recognition because she has paralympic gold medals in three different sports: athletics, swimming and shooting. That is commendable. *[Applause.]* Even in the past 24 hours, Jim Anderson from Broxburn has won two golds and established a new world record in the 200m freestyle swimming, and another young athlete, Andrew Lindsay from Cowdenbeath, has won the 100m backstroke. I hope that the tremendous achievements of those athletes, overcoming obvious difficulties but celebrating on the world stage, will be recognised when they come back home to Scotland.

We have also celebrated the success of Andrew Murray, who will compete at the top level of tennis across the globe. We hope that Andrew will continue the progress he made when he became the first British tennis player to win the US Open junior title. Last weekend, those of us who stayed up late enough experienced the exhilaration of Colin Montgomerie's participation in the Ryder cup team, as he led that team to success. We should celebrate that success.

Margo MacDonald: I wonder whether Colin Montgomerie's achievement could be recognised by inviting him to join us in the opening of the Parliament. The minister might have some influence on that.

Mr McAveety: I would be delighted to offer that, but I imagine that it is not within my remit. The Presiding Officer is looking at me. The First Minister has had a discussion about the possible recognition of Colin Montgomerie's role generally, but an invitation to the opening of the new Parliament building is a matter for the Presiding Officer. I would encourage him to consider Margo MacDonald's suggestion.

Over the past five years, the Executive has made substantial contributions to the development of the talented athletes programme. Awards totalling nearly £13 million have been made from the programme. At junior level, awards of more than £5.5 million have been made. We have substantial commitments to try to ensure that our athletes develop to their fullest potential. The First Minister recognised that when he launched a £2.5

million Commonwealth games fund in November 2002, to help the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland to meet the costs of team training, preparation and participation in future Commonwealth games and Commonwealth youth games. I would like to take this opportunity to wish the very best to our young athletes who will be competing in the youth games in Bendigo in Australia at the end of the year.

I have mentioned a number of key agendas. As well as those, the Executive has massive ambitions to continue to achieve for Scotland in major sporting events. There are continuing debates about which events Scotland should compete for. We have already had the success of the recent rugby under-21 world cup finals. Hopefully, we can build on that in submissions for future rugby world events. We also have commitments to the mountain bike world cup finals, the Heineken cup final next year and the Sudirman cup in 2007. There is a whole series of events in which Scotland will have an opportunity to take part and to showcase the best that we have to offer. When the Ryder cup takes place in Scotland in 2014, we have an opportunity to maximise what we get from our participation.

There has been substantial progress on the sports agenda in Scotland. We recognise that we must increase the participation base in activities. From that, hopefully, we will develop nuggets of talent, and from that, have a pathway not only through the sporting bodies but through the area institutes of sport and the Scottish Institute of Sport. I hope that we can celebrate the result of that in the future. We have an opportunity to continue the progress that has been made, which would not have been made without devolution. Although we have achieved a great deal in sport, we have much more to do.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the significant progress made since devolution in increasing participation in sport through the investment in active schools and the Scottish Executive's commitment to ensure that every child has at least two hours of high quality physical education; celebrates the continuing success of Scotland's sportsmen and women, particularly the medallists at the recent Olympics and those competing for medals at the Paralympics currently under way in Athens, of Andrew Murray at the US Open and most recently of Colin Montgomerie as part of the successful European team in the Ryder Cup; endorses the Executive's ambitions to attract major sporting events in Scotland, building on the successful rugby U21 World Cup; recognises the Executive's ambitions to invest in sports facilities for all talents and abilities, and seeks the support of all partners in meeting the challenges set out in Sport 21, the national strategy for sport in Scotland.

09:47

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I thank the minister for his kind remarks. He can be assured of my support on issues that the Executive are getting correct but, as I am sure he would expect, where I consider that the Executive is failing to come up to the mark, he will be challenged by Scottish National Party members.

Over the summer, we have witnessed two major sporting events in Europe: the European football championships in Portugal and the Olympic games in Athens. Although our Scottish national team failed in its quest to join the rest of the footballing elite at the European football championships, our sportsmen and sportswomen have been successful in the Olympic games. The minister referred to some of them. They include Chris Hoy and Shirley Robertson, who brought back gold medals, and Katherine Grainger and Campbell Walsh, who brought back silver medals. In the past 24 hours, two Scots participating in the paralympics, Jim Anderson and Andrew Lindsay, have taken gold. In fact, that is Jim Anderson's second gold in the paralympics. Those are Scottish Olympians of whom we can be truly proud.

However, when we consider the media coverage of sport in Scotland, we could be forgiven for thinking that successes in sport in Scotland are few and far between. The reality is that we are relatively successful in some fields. In the past year and a half, Scottish sportsmen and sportswomen have secured about 189 different titles in international competitions in orienteering, cycling, golf, boxing and a range of other sports. It came as something of a surprise to me, however, to find out that we have taken 24 medals in the tug-of-war world championships. However, many of the titles that Scottish sportsmen and sportswomen hold are in sports that are considered specialist and elite or that some would describe as minority sports and which often receive little direct financial support or publicity.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Michael Matheson obviously realises the importance of the Olympic games and the Olympic movement, as well as the wonderful achievement of Scottish athletes. Does that mean that his party will get behind the bid to bring the Olympic games to London?

Michael Matheson: I wish the London Olympics bid every success, but as I am sure Rhona Brankin is aware, there is genuine concern about the bid's potential impact on sports funding in Scotland. I want to ensure that that issue is addressed, but I look forward to the possibility of the Olympics taking place in London and to a Scottish team being represented there.

We have sportspersons who compete successfully at an international level and, as the minister highlighted, it is important that we build on that success to ensure that we continue to have success in the international field. That is exactly what the Government in London has chosen to do on the back of the success at the Athens Olympics. Only last week, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in Whitehall launched what it describes as

"a new multi-million pound Government initiative ... to nurture a new generation of sporting talent."

The initiative is called the talented athlete scholarship scheme—TASS—and it exists to support young athletes who are going through higher and further education to allow them to continue with their education while pursuing their sporting careers. To help the programme on its way, the Exchequer has decided to invest some £6 million in the programme over two years.

As one sports coach asked me the other day, what is happening up here? Why is our Government in Scotland not demonstrating the same level of ambition as its colleagues in London? What exactly does the Executive intend to do to build on the success that we have already achieved? Can we expect the Exchequer to be as generous north of the border as it has chosen to be south of the border, to help our talented athletes to build on the success that we have created?

Any sport strategy must also be about supporting sport at community level. That is to do with health, well-being and promoting sport that is fun. In its motion, the Executive has chosen to highlight activities in schools—the active schools programme—and give itself a pat on the back for what it has achieved so far. That progress should be welcomed, but as even the minister has accepted, there is still a long way to go. The minister will also be aware that the active schools programme is only one strand of the proposals that the physical activities task force made a couple of years ago. The other three strands were active homes, active workplaces and active communities, and I believe that the primary reason why the Executive has chosen to focus on active schools is that little, if any, progress has been made on the other three strands that were recommended in the task force's report.

If the minister and the Scottish Government are to be taken seriously on tackling physical inactivity in Scotland, they must raise their game and ensure that they address the issue comprehensively, because we live in inactive times, in which people would rather drive than walk and rather spectate than participate in sport. Even some of my MSP colleagues would rather get a taxi from Waverley station to the new

Parliament than take the 10-minute walk, which would do them the world of good.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): Does Mr Matheson accept that, in stiletto heels, the walk takes slightly longer than 10 minutes?

Michael Matheson: I will have to take Christine May's word for it.

I ask members to consider the consequences of inactivity in Scotland: one male in four and one female in five are clinically obese and, on average, 42 people a week die from heart disease, which is a direct result of inactivity. Forty-two people will die this week, next week and the week after until we do something to stop the trend.

Sport in itself will not address all the health problems of our society. It must be part of a balanced programme, in which sport is a key component, which also addresses issues such as diet, nutrition, poverty and education. When we get that balance right, we will start to make a real difference in the lives of people in Scotland.

Over the past few months, the Executive has announced its intention to invest in sports facilities and the sports infrastructure in Scotland, and the minister stated that intention again today. That investment should, on the face of it, be welcomed, but as with any other Executive announcement about investment, it must be put in context.

Over the past couple of years, the Scottish Executive has commissioned sportscotland to carry out an audit of a range of sports facilities in Scotland. The first audit was on swimming pools, and sportscotland published a report called "The Ticking Time Bomb: The Maintenance, Upgrading and Refurbishment of Scotland's Public Pools" some time ago. That report highlighted the need for some £200 million to be invested in swimming pools alone in Scotland to bring them up to the necessary standard. The second report, which is on indoor sports facilities in Scotland, has already been completed and passed to ministers, but for some reason the Executive has chosen not to publish it to date. I suspect that that is because the report shows that a considerable amount of investment is needed in our indoor sports facilities. It has been suggested to me that, to bring our indoor sports facilities up to the required standard, billions of pounds will require to be invested. Given that our Executive is committed to providing sports facilities for all—for those of a variety of talents and abilities—perhaps the minister will explain to us what it intends to do to address the concerns that have been highlighted in the sportscotland audits.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Does Mr Matheson recall a visit that he and I paid to sports facilities in the Falkirk area? Because they had been constructed using the private

finance initiative, the facilities were virtually unaffordable for members of the public, voluntary organisations or clubs to use. Does he have any thoughts on how the Executive might address that problem and achieve its strategy by making such facilities accessible to ordinary people in Scotland?

Michael Matheson: It is interesting that the minister highlighted the need to ensure that local sports organisations are able to access local sports facilities. The experience in Falkirk is that local sports organisations cannot afford to use the good sports facilities that have been provided in the PFI schools, because of the cost. Swimming pools are lying empty because the local people cannot afford to use the facility. That is the type of problem the Executive must address if it is serious about ensuring that people can access such sports facilities. Falkirk Council has taken the matter a step further and has chosen not to use PFI for its new schools but to go down the route of community ownership, because schools are a key part of communities. That will allow the local community not only to use but to run the local sports facility for the community's benefit.

Given that the Executive is keen on democratic accountability and that we had a lecture on freedom of information yesterday evening from Tavish Scott in the debate on the Fraser inquiry, perhaps the Executive will tell us whether it intends to publish the audit report on indoor sports facilities that sportscotland has completed so that we can see exactly what level of investment in the infrastructure is required.

Last week, I raised with the minister the issue of an important sports facility that we have in Scotland: the facility for indoor rock-climbing at Ratho quarry, which is probably the best in Europe, if not the world. Sadly, that world-class sports facility is in serious financial jeopardy and could be lost if the Executive does not act to ensure that it is protected. I hope that the minister will take on board the need to address that.

The Executive tells us in its motion that it is ambitious about bringing major sporting events to Scotland. I hope that it can live up to that ambition. Rather than telling us that it is ambitious, how about starting to show it by joining us in supporting a solo Scottish bid to hold the 2012 European football championship? On average, sport brings £1.25 billion into the Scottish economy every year. Securing such a major championship would have tremendous spin-offs for the Scottish economy overall. If the Executive is really committed to being ambitious for sport in Scotland, it must start to raise its game.

I move amendment S2M-1733.1, to leave out from "the significant" to end and insert:

"the important contribution of sport in schools, homes, workplaces and communities across Scotland; celebrates the continuing success of Scotland's sportsmen and women, particularly the medallists at the recent Olympics and those competing for medals at the Paralympics currently under way in Athens, of Andrew Murray at the US Open and most recently of Colin Montgomerie as part of the successful European team in the Ryder Cup, and acknowledges the economic importance of sport to the Scottish economy and calls on the Scottish Executive to demonstrate its ambition to hold major sporting events here in Scotland by supporting the call for a solo Scottish bid for the European Football Championships in 2012."

10:01

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have difficulty with the first point in the Executive's motion because we have seen no evidence that children are having

"at least two hours of high quality physical education".

The target is laudable and is included in sportscotland's sport 21 aims, but where is the evidence that the sport 21 targets are being met? The Executive has until now agreed only that that is one way forward.

Earlier this year, Peter Peacock announced at Lasswade High School Centre that the number of teachers would be increased to 53,000 and that 400 extra PE teachers would be in place by 2007. That may be an Executive commitment to Scottish pupils, but when will it be implemented? We should have a date. When will we have a minimum of two hours of high-quality physical education in our schools? The sport 21 targets were set years ago. Why did the Executive not do anything then? Despite its commitment to activity, the Executive has hardly been active—mind you, it banned hunting with dogs, which provided active sport for many people in southern Scotland and the Borders.

I am delighted that our Scottish athletes won medals at the Olympics, but it must be noted that they all trained south of the border and that the sports in which they succeeded are not the core sports that sportscotland promotes, except perhaps cycling. I understand that gold medallist Chris Hoy has said that he would train in Scotland if the new velodrome ever came into being, but as long as it remains one of the Executive's so-called commitments, he will have to train elsewhere.

The national governing bodies of sport are screaming out for more help and encouragement. They involve the people who provide the wherewithal for most would-be athletes who want to take up sport. The national governing bodies must be properly funded to supply a steady stream of good Scottish sport talent from the grass roots right through the system, to provide candidates for the Scottish Institute of Sport to back.

The Executive's aim should be to produce a new generation of Scots who are fit and healthy and who consider sporting activity to be the norm. We want more people to play football rather than to think that they are participating by sitting on the sofa and watching it on television. We want to encourage people to walk and climb the hills of Scotland, to canoe and row the lochs of Scotland and to sail the seas around Scotland. This country has the most beautiful outdoors in the world. It is blighted only by the midge, but even running away from midges is an active sport.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): If the member is so keen for people to walk and to participate in activity outdoors, why did he vociferously oppose access under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003?

Mr McGrigor: That question is extraordinary. Scotland has never had a law of trespass of any kind. People walk all over the hills in Scotland and are never prevented from doing so.

One matter that puzzles me is that since the report of the physical activity task force under John Beattie was produced, the Executive has committed to an active schools programme, but no funding for that comes from the education budget—it all comes from the health budget, which is somewhat stretched, as every member knows. Surely the education budget should be used to promote more sport in schools. After all, PE stands for physical education.

The Executive has also committed to active workplace programmes, active community programmes and active home programmes. I hope that that does not mean that it will poke its nose into people's private lives any more than it has done already. However, no action has been taken on any of those three commitments; they are all empty words and hollow rhetoric and the Executive has failed to translate its rhetoric into action. Instead, it has preferred to pour money into unnecessary and overlapping layers of bureaucracy, endless consultation papers and quangos.

A sporting Scotland would certainly be a more successful Scotland for three main reasons. It would produce improved health, make for stronger and more effective communities and inspire pride and economic growth. Unfortunately, Scotland's participation in physical activity is poor. Treatment of obesity and illnesses that are caused by physical inactivity is estimated to cost the health service £171 million a year. The Executive plans a ban on smoking, but before it does that it should surely consider the effects of junk food which, combined with a lack of exercise, is in many cases more harmful than tobacco.

The value of sport and competitive games in promoting responsibility, enterprise and engagement among young people cannot be overestimated. I was impressed by an article in a *Scotland on Sunday* magazine about what a teacher called John Herbert has achieved at Haghill Primary School in one of the more challenging areas of Glasgow. He has started a mountain biking club called the Haghill Dirt Dawgs. There is no doubt that he has inspired many pupils to feel proud about appearing in bike races all over Scotland. Mr Herbert realised that selling mountain biking as a healthy option would probably not work with the pupils of Haghill or any other school, but they found out that it was fun, which is why they do it. Mr Herbert had an idea that has grown from a little acorn into a mighty oak. At first, he took four or five pupils who enjoyed mountain biking and who persuaded their mates to go, too. Now, 35 pupils bike regularly. They have private sponsorship for equipment and—I am glad to say—that the local council is now helping with a trailer for the bikes.

The moral of that story is that we will create a sporting and successful Scotland not by setting targets, distributing glossy bits of paper or having consultation meetings. It will be brought about by people such as Mr Herbert in Haghill. Money should be spent directly at the grass roots and private inspiration should be encouraged and rewarded. If Mr Herbert can do it, surely the new active schools co-ordinators should be able to do it. If they do not produce results, the Executive should consider whether they are value for money.

What about our national game of shinty? It is a popular Scottish game, especially in the Highlands, which virtually relies on private sponsorship.

Events such as the Ryder cup and the six nations rugby tournament act as catalysts for economic growth. Sporting events attract enormous numbers of visitors every year for the tourism industry, so if we are to be a successful Scotland, we must capitalise on our Olympic athletes' success and host more sporting events.

The mountain bike world cup, which was staged in Fort William, attracted 8,000 spectators. A world-cup village was erected on the Nevis car park, which included a range of expo stands that offered for sale all the equipment that was being used. One local businessman said that his income for that weekend was £3,500, whereas his normal income is £300. That event was a huge success, in stark contrast to the Scottish Executive's golf strategy, which promised everything but delivered nothing.

To finish—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Quickly.

Mr McGrigor: I reiterate that we need physical activity and action from the Executive and not just mental commitments.

I move amendment S2M-1733.3, to leave out from first "recognises" to end and insert:

"laments the lack of significant progress made since devolution in increasing participation in sport; congratulates Scotland's sportsmen and women, particularly the medallists at the recent Olympics and those competing for medals at the Paralympics currently under way in Athens, Andrew Murray at the US Open and most recently Colin Montgomerie as part of the successful European team in the Ryder Cup; endorses the Scottish Executive's ambitions to attract major sporting events in Scotland, building on the successful rugby U21 World Cup; believes that the Executive's fixation with arbitrary targets and control of sport is counter-productive, and believes that, rather than over-spending on consultations, initiatives and glossy brochures, funding should be channelled directly to schools and national governing bodies to be spent on facilities and training."

10:08

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): I join the minister in congratulating the sportsmen and sportswomen who brought honour to themselves and to their country in the recent Olympics and paralympics. I also congratulate Andrew Murray and Colin Montgomerie on their brilliant victories. Congratulations are also due to the minister's local football team on its narrow victory over my local team in the CIS cup on Tuesday. Falkirk FC were—of course—fielding their reserve team, because they were saving themselves for a more important league match against Clyde on Saturday.

Some members may argue with that, but it is difficult to argue with anything in the Executive's motion. Some of the sportsmen and sportswomen whom the motion mentions have been assisted by the Scottish Institute of Sport. I pay tribute to the institute's good work under the leadership of Alistair Gray and Anne Marie Harrison. The institute specialises in trying to improve our elite athletes' performance, but I hope that our top performers' success will inspire other people—especially young people—to participate in sport at whatever level. Some of them may become the stars of tomorrow, but I am sure that all of them will gain a great deal of enjoyment from sport, whether on the athletics track, the football pitch, the golf course or the tennis court.

The Executive motion specifically refers to school sport and the Executive's

"commitment to ensure that every child has at least two hours of high quality physical education".

However, I do not think that the quality of physical education will be enhanced by abolition of the post of principal teacher of physical education and replacement of that post with a faculty head or general factotum who may have no experience or qualifications in physical education. That aspect of the McCrone agreement could have a detrimental effect on physical education and, indeed, on other secondary school subjects. Therefore, I urge the Executive to ensure that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education monitors the situation closely.

When the McCrone agreement was first announced, I suggested that some of the additional resources should be used to give incentives to encourage teachers of any subject to devote some of their time to organisation of school sport. Before the teachers' pay dispute in the 1980s, many teachers used to do that on an unpaid voluntary basis after school hours or on Saturday mornings, but we cannot turn back the clock. An incentive—whether financial reward or time off in lieu—would encourage more teachers to get involved in organising school sport.

As Margo MacDonald suggested, more effort should be put into building stronger links between schools and community sports clubs. I would also like to see more resources for sports facilities in the community through increased local authority funding and lottery funding from sportscotland. Recently, I wrote to the minister about the sportsmatch funding scheme, which is designed to attract commercial funding to grass-roots sport. Many good applications are being rejected and, as a result, commercial sponsors and sports volunteers may be discouraged. Therefore, I urge the minister to investigate the matter with a view to increasing the public funding that is available to the sportsmatch scheme.

I have also had recent correspondence with the minister about the scheme of rates relief of at least 80 per cent for community amateur sports clubs. I welcome the voluntary agreement with local authorities and look forward to the introduction of legislation. However, I urge the minister to extend that relief to water charges, which can also be a considerable burden on amateur sports clubs.

The Scottish Executive and sportscotland should also be more proactive in encouraging clubs to register as community amateur sports clubs with the Inland Revenue so that they qualify for rates relief. At the last count, there were fewer than 100 registered community amateur sports clubs in the whole of Scotland. Therefore, more effort should be put into informing clubs about how to register and about the additional resources that might be available to them if they were to do so.

It is all very well for the Scottish Executive to bask in the glory of the sporting success of some

of our sports stars, but the Executive must match its fine words with action to ensure that there are adequate resources for sport. Funding of sport is an investment for success and an investment in people, the Scottish economy and the nation's health and well-being. It is also an investment in Scotland's self-confidence and prestige on the international stage. Therefore, I urge the Parliament to accept my amendment.

I have great pleasure in moving amendment S2M-1733.2, to insert at end:

"but recognises that none of the above will be achieved without more resources invested at local level under the auspices of sportscotland and local authorities."

10:14

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I welcome this debate. There is still not nearly enough attention paid to sport in the Government system in Scotland and the United Kingdom. Sport should be a more vital part of many people's lives than it currently is.

The minister made an excellent speech and he has made a good personal contribution in this area of work to which he is personally committed. However, there must be enough resources behind sport. For that reason, I urge him to accept Dennis Canavan's amendment to the motion, which calls for more resources.

The minister can argue fairly that sport should get a much bigger part of the health budget and of the community development budget. As well as being good in itself and enjoyable—which is why people should be involved in it—sport has side-effects in that it creates health and reduces obesity. It also has a much underestimated effect on the morale of communities. Local boys or girls football teams and other clubs for the wide range of sports that are available can do a lot for communities. They can raise the morale of communities, reduce problems and so on. Therefore, sport can make a legitimate call on health and community development budgets. Without increasing the overall Government budget, much more could be achieved by getting more money for sport. I urge the minister to consider that.

Mr McGrigor: Earlier, I pointed out that funding for the active schools programme comes entirely from the health budget. Should not it come from the education budget? The member says that the health budget should be used, but surely the education budget should be used.

Donald Gorrie: I was not arguing exclusively. Obviously, education should contribute greatly to sport, as it currently does. Things should happen and we should pay to help things to happen, but which budget is used is a matter of total

indifference. I was merely suggesting to the minister arguments that he could advance to colleagues who have bigger budgets than he has. He could argue that he should have a share of those budgets.

We should start at the bottom. Other members can talk about very successful sportspeople and high-profile events, which are fine, but I am more interested in more people getting more pleasure and benefit out of sport than is currently the case. Work has been done in schools through widening the curriculum and through some Government initiatives, but sport still does not, in the eyes of most school authorities, have the status that it should have. It is seen as an add-on and as a nice thing for people to do, but it should be absolutely central, along with the arts and other neglected areas of the curriculum. We must enhance the status of sport and PE in the eyes of teachers and important people.

As others have said, we must improve the relationship between schools and clubs. Again, some work has been done on that, but much more could be done. Other members have said that much more could be done after school and at weekends by using PE teachers and other teachers—Dennis Canavan mentioned that—and local club coaches. I am sure that we could develop a system in which there is much more activity and much more use of facilities and in which people's talents are used. Some of those people might want to be paid a bit—we could consider that—but many more would simply like to be recognised more for the contribution that they make. Teachers used to be promoted because they did out-of-school activities, but nowadays, teachers seem to be promoted for other reasons and out-of-school activities do not seem to count so much. We should recognise the great contribution that all such people make.

We should core fund our sports clubs better than we currently do. I am not talking about huge sums; a few hundred pounds, or one or two thousand pounds at most would make a huge difference to two of the athletic clubs with which I am involved. Instead of spending hours of their time trying to raise money, they could spend hours of their time coaching the kids, which is what they are keen on.

We should also pay to help people to take up coaching and to obtain qualifications in coaching. Once people are qualified, most of them would not want to be paid, but it costs quite a lot to get the various qualifications. The very least that we could do is pay to help them to obtain such qualifications and to assist them through the bureaucracy to obtain them. There is a vehicle in the new United Kingdom national coaching certificate, which we could use as a way of developing coaching. There are also people in the Sector Skills Council for

Active Leisure and Learning—SkillsActive—in Scotland, for example, with whom the minister is involved and who work to get people who are involved in sport to obtain qualifications. We could produce much more in the way of coaches and other voluntary helpers, who are at the heart of sporting activity.

We should also examine charges. Many councils charge far too much and therefore discourage clubs and individuals from using facilities. We have to strengthen the connection between the paid staff who work for SportScotland and other sports bodies and volunteers. Many trained staff are not very good at working with volunteers.

Clubs fail in many ways, because they do not know their way around things. They could make more use of the voluntary action fund and of volunteer centres, for example. We could give much more help to clubs to do what they do best, which is coaching young people. They could be helped in recruiting more members and in getting more funding from local organisations. That is at the heart of the matter.

I was going to speak about football, but it is such a disaster area on the whole that I will not, except to say that we should increase the support that we give to supporters. Democracy has great failings, as we all demonstrate, but a bit of democracy in Scottish football would do a great deal of good; Scottish football could not possibly do worse than it is doing at the moment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come now to the open part of the debate. Time is very tight, so I ask that speeches be kept to a tight six minutes.

10:21

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): One huge advantage of having a daughter whose boyfriend is Greek is that it was possible to arrange tickets and accommodation for the Olympic games in Athens more easily. The spectacle of the 4x100m relay final and the performance of Kelly Holmes is still in my mind. There was also the fantastic achievement of the other athletes, and of the Scottish athletes in particular.

We have all spoken about our local heroes today. In my case, it would have to be Todd Cooper, the swimmer from Stirling. There is also Campbell Walsh, who lives in Bridge of Allan, where I live. The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport mentioned the paralympics and the current successes. Other recent Scottish successes include those of Colin Montgomerie and Andrew Murray, the United States junior open tennis champion, who did a lot of his work in Dunblane and Bridge of Allan. I hope that we will be able to

build on his achievement. The tennis centre at the University of Stirling will have an important part to play in future training opportunities for tennis, and we hope that progress will continue to be made there.

The achievements that I have mentioned represent sport at the highest level. Centres of excellence such as the University of Stirling play their part but, as most members have said, that level of excellence is not all that matters; sport is much more than that. Sport has an important part to play in promoting a healthy nation—Michael Matheson mentioned the risk to health of being inactive. Stirling Council's present policy, which is called active Stirling, helps in that promotion. It is claimed that inactive people run twice the risk of coronary heart disease, have higher blood pressure, are at greater risk of becoming overweight or obese and have more injuries and accidents.

We must build on the facts that many youngsters are interested in sport and that their heroes are in sport. Donald Gorrie mentioned football. Many young people look on footballers—as well as rugby players, boxers and others—as their heroes. We must build on that and bring more of our sportsmen and sportswomen into the limelight to encourage all of us to be more active and healthy. As we become more active, we should recognise the fact that we can develop better physiques, which is a good thing not just for teenagers but for all of us, whatever age we are.

Let us consider what is happening in the Stirling Council area. The council has three strands to its policy, the first of which is sports development, which encompasses progression and the idea of a ladder, whereby young people can start sport at school, as Andrew Murray did, and can then build up their ability and become an elite athlete. The second strand is active community development, which links clubs with the various facilities and organisations. The third strand is the facilities themselves.

All those strands require effective co-operation. That means co-operation between council committees and between regional and national centres and co-operation with sports councils, including local sports councils, the Scottish Institute of Sport and sportscotland. We do not just need a mechanism to enable progression to take place for those who want to become elite athletes; we need to allow access for all. Disability has to be at the centre of any council's policy.

I take issue slightly with what Michael Matheson said about the public-private partnership in Falkirk. In Stirling, we do not have similar problems at Balfron Primary School. We are hopeful that our new proposals for PPP development for other secondary schools in the area will result in their

having sports facilities similar to those at Balfron. There, access is not a problem and state-of-the-art facilities are being provided. That is needed as part of any local council programme.

Central strategies are also important, as a number of members have said. We have sport 21 and the active schools programme, and more links are being established. However, we should also listen to some of the points that have been made by Conservative members about getting specialist coaches into schools and about promoting the development of clubs and perhaps linking that more closely with school sport development. The other day, Mary Scanlon spoke about the need to develop rugby; under Stirling Council's policy, many primary schools in the area are starting rugby taster sessions.

I stress the importance of facilities. In my constituency, we are examining the upgrading of swimming facilities, sports halls and outdoor pitches. We welcome the allocation by the Scottish Executive of £2.5 million of strategy fund money for national and regional sports facilities.

Possibly the most important thing is the importance of sport to individuals for their self-esteem, confidence and health—the very points that the minister made.

10:28

Richard Lochhead (North East Scotland) (SNP): I begin by congratulating Michael Matheson, our new front-bench spokesperson on sport and culture, on his classic opening speech. It is not just that Michael has been elevated to the SNP shadow Cabinet; sport and culture is now a Cabinet portfolio in its own right, which illustrates the importance that the SNP attaches to these issues.

It is a pleasure to follow Sylvia Jackson's speech. I attended the University of Stirling. Back in those days, I played squash and five-a-side football several times a week at the sports facilities there.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): You never did.

Richard Lochhead: Linda Fabiani says otherwise but, in those days, I had a slightly better physique than I have today, I must admit. Playing sport at Stirling was somewhat offset by the alcohol that I consumed at the Gannochy, which is, of course, the pub at the sports complex. That perfect combination at the university was absolute heaven.

The debate covers many issues, including health and fitness. A few months ago, when I was travelling back up to Aberdeen by train, I found myself sitting next to two public health professors

from the universities in Aberdeen. We got on to the subject of obesity. They were frustrated by the fact that the whole political debate in Scotland at the time was about diet. That is still true to a certain degree today—rightly so—but they felt that the most important factor affecting people's health was a lack of physical exercise, and not simply diet. Lifestyle is responsible for Scotland's appalling health record, as well as what people eat. That is reflected in many ways. For example, when I took my family to the Centreparks complex in Cumbria a few months ago, I was amazed to find a walk-in dryer in the swimming pool changing rooms. It is a rather pathetic illustration of the convenience society in which we now live that people do not even have to burn off a few calories drying themselves with a towel. We live in a remote-control society, which means that we do not have to get out of our seats to change television channels. Moreover, we have a different working environment in which people carry out less manual work and are not as physically active.

I want to highlight some broader aspects where we might be able to change people's lifestyles, give them more access to sporting facilities and so on. On planning, when new housing estates are built nowadays, no attention is paid to giving people in those communities the ability to participate in sports or physical activity. For example, there is no obligation to provide sports facilities in new estates. We really must address that problem. I know of many housing estates in north-east Scotland that have neither postboxes nor leisure amenities for local people. Surely we must consider providing sports facilities in new estates so that people have access to the necessary infrastructure that will allow them to participate in physical activity. Moreover, with the advent of out-of-town shopping, people simply get in their cars to go to the shops. There is no incentive for them to do any physical activity because they do not have to walk anywhere.

The other aspect of planning that I want to touch on is access to land, by which I mean not just the debate on walking in the countryside that was mentioned earlier, but the ability to purchase land. I am aware of many rural communities that cannot access land in order to build a village hall that the community can use for sporting activities such as badminton. We need some joined-up thinking in Government circles to ensure that those communities are able to get their hands on land and build communal facilities for sporting and other activities.

Health service land, particularly in our cities, is being sold off for private housing developments that completely lack sports facilities. For example, the five-a-side pitches in Aberdeen are extremely popular and are always oversubscribed. However, for some reason, it is difficult to get such pitches

built, even though people in Aberdeen and other cities are desperate to use them. At the same time, publicly owned organisations are selling off land for private housing or other developments that do not take the public interest into account. Ministers must address some of these questions. When public land is sold off, is it possible to give priority to developments such as sports facilities that have a continuing public interest?

Sylvia Jackson touched on some of the wider benefits of sporting activity for the Scottish population, such as health. I was interested to read in today's press that University of Glasgow researchers have discovered that people can recover from breast cancer operations a lot more quickly if they lead more active lives and participate in sport. Of course, we all know that Scotland has the worst health record in Europe and that we have to get people more active if we are to ensure that they become healthy.

Finally, on infrastructure, although the system of cycle routes has expanded in many communities, that expansion has been a little bit bitty in some council areas where the cash to build new routes is not available. Ministers should attend to that issue. Furthermore, we should at least agree to the principle of making a solo bid for the European championships in 2012. That will allow us to sketch out the infrastructure that we will need in a few years' time if we are to be successful. Such an infrastructure would have enormous wider benefits for communities throughout Scotland and I urge the minister to say that he supports the principle of a solo bid. After all, making sport a bigger priority and giving it a lot more resources will mean a win-win situation for Scotland, and I encourage the minister to take the same attitude.

10:34

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I listened with interest to the minister's opening speech. Usually, these debates on sport follow the publication of a fairly vacuous glossy brochure by the Executive or feature an announcement of yet another initiative that delays action or provides money for the expansion of sports administrations. I am relieved to find that no brochure has been published and am interested to see that the minister's speech did not contain any announcements.

I recall that, when I was the Conservative sports spokesman, I had a conversation with Sam Galbraith in which he told me that sport was a bilateral, consensual issue on which parties tended to agree and to work together for the good of sport in Scotland. I must say that such a consensual blancmange meant that sports policy was not pushed hard enough and that when the Conservatives were in government they were not

pressed to deliver more. Although many significant advances were made in that time—the most important of which was the introduction of lottery funding—I accept that more could have been done, particularly to arrest the decline of sport in schools. Indeed, a number of speakers have already pointed out that very issue. Thankfully, the minister is doing his level best to end that bilateral consensual approach and we are finding that we are disagreeing more and more with some of the Executive's actions and policies.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Monteith: No, I will carry on at the moment.

The Conservatives have supported—and will continue to support—the minister's announcements of funding for facilities. However, he has been silent on many questions. In that respect, I want to touch on two sports: tennis and football. I note that Andrew Murray is mentioned in the motion. The coaching facilities that were available to him and a number of other players, including his brother, were discussed in an article published in the *Sunday Herald* in January, which said that

“success has come despite, not because of, the standard of facilities on offer—the coaching session”

that they had been going to

“had been planned for the morning, but was postponed to the afternoon because the Scottish Rugby Union had booked the courts first.”

In the same article, Andrew's mother and coach, Judy Murray, is quoted as saying:

“We have no designated court of our own, and the national centre doesn't belong to us in any shape or form ... At the moment, we are beholden to the”

Lawn Tennis Association,

“with a little bit of money from sportscotland.

There's me and two other coaches for the whole of Scotland—that's from the under-10s right through to the seniors. Once kids get to a certain level we're losing them all the time. What I really need is more people to help me, and more people to believe.”

The questions remain. What is being done about indoor tennis facilities and about ensuring that there are more coaches to help the likes of Judy Murray? How can we ensure that funding reaches those who need it? It should be noted that Judy Murray resigned her position in Tennis Scotland and that Andrew Murray ended up being taught in Barcelona.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention now?

Mr Monteith: No, I have no time for it. I am certainly not wasting my time on an intervention from Mr Stevenson, that's for sure.

As far as football is concerned, funding for all-weather and indoor facilities is welcome, because they are a necessity, and the Executive will enjoy our support on that issue. However, what assurances can the minister provide that public money for youth football will be well managed? Is he able to assure me that it will not be used to create a tier of so-called football co-ordinators who are not coaches but bureaucrats in tracksuits and who ensure that competitiveness is taken out of schools football? At the moment, when a team goes five goals up, the score is reset to nil-nil; competitive games are not allowed, and everyone is a winner. Anyone who does not believe that that is happening need only look at Edinburgh schools.

How does the minister respond to serious concerns about the Scottish Football Association's mismanagement of public money at the Scottish Football Museum? The issue is important, because the SFA is the channel for the public funding that he has announced. Moreover, what confidence does he have in the SFA when it rides roughshod over the Scottish Schools Football Association and the Scottish Youth Football Association? What confidence does he have when the SFA youth co-ordinator resigns not long after his appointment and just before the *News of the World* publishes an article? What confidence does he have when premier league clubs organise training days for their youth players on Saturday mornings to stop them playing for their school football teams? What is the SFA doing about that? Should it get away with taking no action and continue to receive public money?

Many great things are happening in Scottish sport. A number of those have been mentioned today. The unofficial world golf champions are the team from the University of Stirling, which has won all its games against universities in the United States. The best football match that I saw last season was the Scottish schools senior shield final at Hampden. That is the level at which we must encourage sport. I look forward to hearing more challenging announcements and more answers from the minister.

10:40

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for giving me the opportunity to make my first speech in this stunning complex.

One of the great benefits of being in government—as we are in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom—is that we can put our beliefs into practice. That requires clear policies, implemented with determination and certainty. The programme for government set out clear priorities and policies in sport, but I am not sure that we have been as effective as we might have been in implementing those.

I can speak only from my experience as a constituency MSP who is trying to promote the well-being of the people of Kilmarnock and Loudoun. I get the impression that too often people in the sports establishment are interfering with our policies, watering them down and even changing them to their own ends. It takes a strong ministerial hand on the tiller to drive through change. That is what we need to ensure a successful sporting Scotland.

I give as an example the proposal for football academies. Investment was made in some clubs, and it was agreed that a football academy would be based at Kilmarnock Football Club—I am sure that you looked forward to that as much as I did, Presiding Officer. Much work was done to advance the proposal, and we were convinced that the academy would be set up as an effective partnership involving Kilmarnock Football Club, East Ayrshire Council, sportscotland and the Executive. At the last moment, we were advised that, to coin a phrase, the goalposts had been moved. The new aim was to have a multisports academy. Nothing daunted, we prepared a submission for such an academy, in which many sports, the health service and further education would be partners. Again the rules were changed, to demand a facility that would be beyond the scope of a medium-sized local authority such as East Ayrshire Council.

The people of Kilmarnock and Loudoun still do not have the sports academy that would enable them to develop the excellence for which the policy aims. Despite meetings with the minister and the involvement of politicians at all levels, we have not been able to identify who was responsible for this flip-flop of policy, which does nothing to give my constituents the impression of consistency and determination in pursuing excellence in sport.

Policies cannot be geared only towards excellence. We must also direct our attention to involvement in sport. For the sake of our nation's health, we must attract increasing numbers of young people to sporting activity. However, we must not be seduced by those in traditional sports who say that theirs is the only route to fitness. We must encourage young people to become involved in such sports, but when they choose alternative routes to fitness we must encourage those, too. When a local successful Muay Thai boxing club tried to access funding to develop its sport, the club was told that Muay Thai was not a recognised sport, despite having Olympic recognition. Because of that ruling, the club could not access funding from the local sports council or sportscotland. How does that encourage young people?

The same has happened in the so-called extreme sports. There is and has been a demand

in Kilmarnock and Loudoun for skateboarding facilities. However, when the local council examined how it could satisfy that demand it was dissuaded from providing facilities by the insurance demands of its insurers. We know that there is a demand for such facilities—anyone who walks around our streets can see that. We must become proactive in investing in such sports. Instead of looking for reasons not to recognise and support them, we should ask ourselves how we can positively support young people and invest in their priorities.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Margaret Jamieson: I am about to finish.

The challenge for the minister is to steer a strong course and ensure that all those who deliver our priorities do so in the way we want, rather than in the way they want. If we want to deliver on the priorities of a fitter, healthier and successful Scotland through sport, let us be innovative and proactive, investing in the people's priorities with confidence and consistency. Let us be ambitious for Scotland.

10:45

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I am sure that a sporting Scotland would be a successful Scotland, and I welcome the Scottish Executive's commitment to trying to deliver that. However, although I congratulate Scotland's athletes on their recent successes, it must be recognised that they are the cream of a small minority of Scots who participate in sport. Their success indicates to me the potential that Scotland has to produce many world-class athletes. However, it is not an indicator of the overall support that exists for sporting activity. In many ways, the relative success of the few allows the rest of us to delude ourselves into believing that we are a great sporting nation.

There is a much more important issue to address in this debate than that of Scotland's sporting success. In my view, the debate would have been better titled "A sporting Scotland is a healthy Scotland." From all reports, it seems that Scotland is classed as the unhealthiest nation in Europe—not something of which we should be proud, but that I fear may be true. Tackling that problem would not only improve our health but would save money in the long term. Money spent today on sports reduces the demand on the health service next week, next year and in the next decade.

Many members will know that primary schools in rural Scotland are almost devoid of sporting activity. Many have neither sports fields nor physical training instructors. If we are to build sporting activity in Scotland for the future, we must

introduce our young people to a wide variety of sports at a young age. That will not necessarily be easy. We must address the challenge of persuading the youth of today that participating in sport offers as much enjoyment as—indeed, more enjoyment than—sitting in front of a television screen playing computer games. That will take a good deal more money, not just parliamentary good will.

As a nation, we are keen to boast of Scottish success on the sports field, but we must not be deluded into thinking that that is anything other than the result of the steely determination of individual sportsmen or sportswomen. Often such success is aided by luck. I say that because in many cases success is possible only because an individual has easy access to good sporting facilities. Most Scottish children are not so lucky. As a result, not only will they not become champions, they may not even stay fit. That is why it is vital that we take action today to encourage mass participation in sports by our children.

Recently I was contacted by a young Inverness student, a lady who competes in the modern pentathlon. Unfortunately, the modern pentathlon is not supported by sportscotland. Why that is the case is a mystery. The young lady to whom I refer is ranked fourth in the world at junior level and fifth in Britain at senior level. She won all three British championships in 2003, but there is a lack of facilities for her discipline in Scotland—she receives no support at all. She has had to move to the University of Bath, where all the facilities for modern pentathlon training are provided. Unfortunately, because this young lady is from Scotland and is not in a discipline recognised by sportscotland, she has to provide all the funding for her activities down there. The students who are alongside her at the University of Bath from England are supported fully by Sport England, so what is wrong with sportscotland that it does not encourage its athletes, particularly those on the elite training programmes?

We recently had a great opportunity to fly the flag for Scotland when we attracted the horse driving championships—an international event that Scotland was proud and honoured to host at Hopetoun House. Efforts were made to get funding from sportscotland and from the Scottish Executive, but it was not available. Were it not for the efforts of volunteers in that area and throughout Scotland, the event would have been lost to Scotland, which would have been a great shame. If we are to become a proud sporting nation, we must give far more support to our young, dedicated athletes at all levels of sport. That will allow us to claim that we truly are a proud sporting nation.

10:51

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):

In yesterday's debate on the Holyrood inquiry report, we heard a lot about the importance of symbolism, in particular the symbolism of a building to a nation. I suggest that despite the stushie created by the building, it is not as relevant to the people of Scotland as politicians might like to think.

If we were to ask the man or woman in the street in Scotland what or who motivates them and what symbol of Scotland is important to them, I guess that we would hear answers such as Parkhead, Ibrox, Tynecastle, Easter Road, Murrayfield, Jinky Johnstone, Davie Cooper, Gavin Hastings, Jamie McFadden, Henrik Larsson and Laudrup.

Rhona Brankin: I am not suggesting that the member should accost strange women in the street, but does he spend time talking to women about what excites them in sport?

John Swinburne: I take Rhona Brankin's point.

I congratulate the 24 Scots who competed in team Great Britain at this year's Olympics and the Scots who are currently competing in the paralympics. However, I cannot help thinking that the excellent results of those Olympians were more often a case of winning despite the lack of facilities rather than as a result of long-term, radical and successful sporting development. That is not meant to be a negative jibe as part of the usual Scottish cringe; those seem to be the sentiments of the Olympians themselves.

Scotland's four Olympic medal winners were rightly hosted by the First Minister in Edinburgh a few weeks ago. However, I was dismayed to learn that all four live outwith Scotland. In fact, they are forced to do so in order to pursue their sport. Canoeist Campbell Walsh said:

"I would happily be based in Scotland if there were facilities, but to train at the top level in my sport you have to move to Nottingham."

Jamie McGrigor also mentioned that point.

Most of the sports successes of this country are a result of personal endeavour, not investment at grass-roots level in our communities or schools. The recently announced funding from the Scottish Executive and private partners for institutes of sport is commendable—particularly the funding for projects that will bring us much-needed indoor facilities in a country that has such a poor climate. The Executive's £50 million will be topped up to £230 million thanks to private partners: that funding will represent a large building programme. At the announcement of the funding, the Minister for Finance and Public Services, Andy Kerr, said that

"the new national and regional facilities will also help us

realise our ambition of making Scotland a major events destination”

and

“will allow us to build on our recent successes in attracting major sporting events here in the future.”

Scotland hosted the champions league final, but why did Scotland, such a great footballing nation, not have the ambition to make a solo bid for the 2008 European championships. When I consider the ambitious investment that is being made at Wembley, I feel cheated given the lack of hope and ambition put into Hampden by comparison.

The reality is bleak. Some of our communities and the citizens living in them are so excluded that taking part in sport is alien to them; even more alien to them is the notion of entering a sports institution. Research on participation in sports shows that sports that had some of Scotland’s Olympic successes—rowing and sailing—enjoy the least participation. The number of people participating in outdoor activities also declines in lower social classes.

That brings me back to Jinky Johnstone and others who learned their trade in the streets of their respective communities. What is happening in our streets and playing areas in Scotland today? Traffic prevents ball games from being played in the streets. Too many of our playing areas are being targeted for development, and action must be taken to end that practice. Representatives of the National Playing Fields Association gave a very good talk to the cross-party group on sport; they explained how they literally have to defend green spaces in our communities. Our national planning policy guidelines contain a presumption against development on playing fields but, despite that, local authorities seem to look to their own financial interests and seem very willing to sell off those spaces for property and commercial development.

The National Playing Fields Association has campaigned tirelessly against the loss of playing fields throughout Scotland, and the Scottish Executive could take positive action by making it a statutory consultee in future planning applications. Instead of selling off such spaces, local authorities should consider how they can best be used for the better health of their communities and the sporting prosperity of our country. We all like heroes and a country needs heroes, but they must come from diverse backgrounds and must speak with different voices. Jimmy Reid, of Clydeside fame, famously said that the poor were deprived of sporting opportunities. He said:

“Give me a thousand pairs of running shoes and I will give you an Olympic medallist.”

10:57

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): I welcome the personal commitment that the minister gave this morning to sporting activity. The progress made so far by the Scottish Executive is welcome. There has been significant improvement, but this morning we need to take the opportunity to urge further development.

As I have shared some sports fields with the minister, he will know that I engage in sport, despite my physique. There is no truth in the rumour that I believe that if God had wanted me to touch my toes, he would have put them further up my body, nor do I hold to the opinion that the one advantage of exercise is that we will all die healthier.

I join the minister in recognising the contribution of the Scots paralympians. Their achievements in recent days have been important to us all in enabling us to recognise their value and what they can contribute to Scottish society. However, important though the recognition given by the minister and other members is, I urge the minister to go further and to ensure that the paralympians are recognised in the same way as our other Olympians were recognised, and that they also have a reception at Bute House and are given the opportunity to go through the streets of Edinburgh.

It is vital that sport is seen as a way of promoting inclusion in our society. We must use the examples of James Anderson, Andrew Lindsay and others who have done so well for us in recent times and add them to the Colin Montgomeries and Andrew Murrays who play sport at the top level. Our contribution to the disabled community must be to promote the accessibility of sports to them.

As John Swinburne and others said, there are certainly potential heroes and top sportspeople out there in Scotland. It is also true that there are potential heroes in the disabled community who cannot get access to sport because the facilities are not there. Disabled people are not taken into consideration when sports facilities are located too far away for people to be able to travel to them, are not accessible and offer a restricted range of sports.

What is true for the disabled community is true for the rest of society. Members have pointed out that the standard of available facilities is vital. For example, there is a sports club in my home village of Newarthill, in my constituency, which is primarily an amateur boxing club but is open to the wider community as a fitness centre. Unfortunately, the facility that people use is a dilapidated old portakabin, which was donated by a former business. The club is the only such facility in the

village and the community needs modern facilities. I have worked closely with the club to try to secure support and resources from sportscotland for a new facility, and we have tried to draw in people from the private sector who have a commitment to the local community. However, we are caught in a dilemma. The demand is there—local football clubs would participate in a new facility—but the resources are not there to provide the facilities that the football clubs would need. As the minister knows, football is primarily played during the winter months, when it gets dark early, so floodlights are needed if young boys and girls are to be able to participate. However, the resources are not there to provide floodlights. It is a catch-22 situation: there is an identified demand and a willingness to provide facilities, but the resources are not there to provide the facilities that would attract more resources. That vicious circle needs to be addressed in any future strategies that the minister might develop.

There is real frustration that young people who want to participate in sport cannot get access to sport. I am from Lanarkshire, so I can knock on the head the myth that young people do not want to take part in youth activities because they do not want to spill their Buckfast. Young people want to get involved in sport, but the facilities are not available in their communities to allow them to do so and to become the heroes that we have heard about. We must exploit the potential that is there and do all that we can to ensure that if someone has ability—whatever their sport might be—the facilities are available to enable them to tap into that ability. We do not want more people to leave Scotland to play for England, as Peter Nicol did, because it is their only way of making progress; we want people to stay in Scotland because they can achieve their full potential in Scotland—that is what this debate should be about.

We must ensure that Scots regard Scotland as the place where they can maximise their abilities. As John Swinburne said, our bigger football clubs, such as Celtic and Rangers should be regarded not as the big stepping stones that players can use to get to England or Europe, but as clubs in which players can maximise their ability and which will be given support to compete in Europe or wherever they are, using Scots players. We must ensure that players regard Scots football and sports clubs as the places where they can be all that they can be. I welcome what the minister said, but I urge him to go as far as possible as quickly as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We must move to five-minute speeches because of the number of members who want to speak. I call Stewart Stevenson and thank him for agreeing to limit his speech to five minutes.

11:04

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I support the definition of sport in the sport 21 strategy, which was set out by the Council of Europe in 2001. Thinking more tightly promotes mental well-being—let us all try to do that.

I declare an interest. Members of my immediate family have received grants from sportscotland. I assure the minister that we have contributed to target 7 in the sport 21 strategy by delivering one world championship so far. I hope that my relatives will continue to be successful on the international stage.

Professionalism in sport has not been mentioned. My view is that such professionalism is unhelpful. In Scotland our heroes used to be the Eric Liddells of this world, but now they are the Eric Cantonas. When I was an asthmatic young lad I was not fit and could engage in sport only to a limited extent, but I used to play rugby. I could play in the front row of the scrum because the rules—when I was a lad—were quite simple. The ball would go out the back of the scrum, get fumbled by somebody at the back, and a loose maul would form. By the time I got out of the set scrum and joined the back of the loose maul—I could walk to it—the whistle would have been blown and we would have a set scrum. My point is that rugby used to be a game for players of all abilities and fitness levels. The set in when the rules about kicking into touch were changed to make a better game for the spectators. As a result, rugby can be played only by fit people and if I was an asthmatic youngster today, I would not be able to play. The changes to the rules were driven by the needs of spectators, to the detriment of the people who engage in the sport. Professionalism and a reliance on spectators do not offer a useful way forward.

I am surprised that there has been no mention of a Scottish sporting tradition. Highland games have been held since the 13th century. Those local, competitive sporting events are accessible to all. My young neighbours Amie and Lucie knock on my door every year after the Cornhill Highland games to show me the medals that they have won. We should support such positive engagement. For example, it would cost the Executive a little but almost nothing to buy the medals for local Highland games, but the indication from the centre that the games' contribution to Scottish sporting life is valued would motivate organisers to keep going. Even playing the bagpipes meets the definition of sport that the Executive uses. Of course, playing the bagpipes improves people's breathing capacity.

I am approaching my bus-pass years—I will reach them before the next election—but age is no barrier to participation in sport. In 1987, I saw the

Australian over-40s long-distance running champion on Australian television. He was over 90 and he had won the competition for 41 consecutive years. A key message is that someone who starts fit can stay fit.

The Tories suggested that tobacco somehow makes a positive contribution to sport—for heaven's sake, we know why Jamie McGrigor and Brian Monteith would not take interventions. We must nail that lie. The tobacco industry is no longer as engaged in sport as it used to be, which is excellent news that sends the right message to people in communities throughout Scotland.

Members should consider some of the things that we could all do. For example, we could club together to buy equipment to help us to become reasonably fit—there is a room in which we could put such equipment. I do not suggest that we rely on the public purse for the money; we could provide the equipment ourselves and set an example. More of us should walk from Waverley station; it is 10 minutes for me and my wife tells me that it is 12 minutes. If high heels are a barrier, I ask the minister to dig deep and buy them some shoes just for the journey. They will last for a long time because they will only be worn for 20 or 30 minutes a day.

Let Scotland's slogan be "Rise up from your couch. You have nothing to lose but your blubber." The facilities are on our doorstep; it is Scotland's countryside and it is free.

11:10

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I reassure Stewart Stevenson that I am perfectly capable of walking from Waverley in high heels, and considerably further than that.

I rise to speak, first because I had the good fortune to be the convener of the sport 21 review group, which reported in 2003. I notice that the chair of sportscotland, Alastair Dempster, and Lee Cousins from sportscotland are in the gallery. Lee Cousins was very diligent in the production of the review and did a tremendous amount of background work.

Brian Monteith referred to vacuous and glossy brochures being produced by the Scottish Executive. I certainly hope that he does not include the review report within that definition, because it was produced through consensus and discussion with the entire sports community and it includes several extremely challenging and important targets.

One of the most hard-fought of those targets was to provide every child with at least two hours of quality physical education every week. At the time of the review, that was a contentious idea. I

am sure that my colleague Karen Gillon will remember that, because she served on the review group as convener of the then Education, Culture and Sport Committee. We got strong advice that it would be difficult to deliver on that objective because of curriculum constraints and the shortage of PE teachers. However, the group continued to fight vociferously for it and it got through, and I am delighted that Scottish ministers are determined to overcome the barriers to providing children with that and are making that commitment clear again today.

I am slightly surprised that, in their amendments, the SNP and the Tories exclude that commitment to two hours a week of quality physical education. There seems to be a suggestion that we are concentrating too much on the school experience, but it is essential that we get young people to adopt a healthy lifestyle when they are at school, because that is the easiest thing to do. It is more difficult to get us old fatties to turn our lifestyles around after many decades of not being particularly fit. It is important for future generations that we get young people actively engaged in physical activity from an early age, and that is why that commitment is so important.

I cannot take interventions in my speech because of time constraints. However, perhaps a SNP member might be able to tell me why there is a motion at the SNP conference that suggests that money should be taken from sportscotland to fund a health programme.

Stewart Stevenson: It is a tiny amount.

Dr Murray: I am sorry, but I have not got time for interventions.

In my brief time as a minister, we were always trying to get money from the health and education portfolios, because we wanted to make the connection that sport and culture are so important to the national health of our country. They should be funded more directly and that is why we were trying to raid those budgets. I hope that the SNP does not want to reverse that.

Of course, sporting excellence is essential to inspiring participation in sport and physical activity. It also encourages community spirit and identity. I had no problem cheering for Britain at the Olympics. I cheered for Scotland at the Commonwealth games, for Britain at the Olympics and for Europe during the Ryder cup. Perhaps that says something about devolution.

In the short time that I have left, I pay tribute to the valuable contribution of the voluntary sector and the huge army of volunteers who give their hours to be coaches, to serve on sports councils, and to nurture and reward young talent. A tremendous success in Dumfries has been the midnight football programme, which the local

community police organised to address some of the problems of antisocial behaviour and under-age drinking that they were considering. It was well attended, although mainly by young men. A few young women took part, but more young women came along to have a look at the young men who were taking part.

Karen Gillon: That is a sport.

Dr Murray: Yes, indeed.

I touch also on the problems of some talented young people in getting the funding to get to competitions as they get more talented. I have to direct young people who come to me with inquiries to several bodies, including the council, area committees and education trusts, and I wonder whether that could be streamlined. If there was a single portal that young people could use to get support, it would be easier for them to go to international competitions and to make progress in developing their talents.

I am pleased that the Executive continues to acknowledge the huge contribution that sport makes to Scotland, not only to our cultural identity but to our national health. I hope that sport will continue to move up the list of the Executive's priorities in years to come, because it is so valuable to our nation.

11:15

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I add my congratulations to our medallists from Scotland. Perhaps one of the most considerable successes was that of the Scottish paralympic cyclist, Aileen McGlynn, who claimed a silver medal on Monday 20 September in the open sprint class for visually impaired athletes. It was also wonderful to see the Scottish Olympic gold and silver medal winners, who included Chris Hoy for cycling, Shirley Robertson for sailing, Campbell Walsh for the kayak slalom, and Katherine Grainger for the coxless pairs rowing. Those Scottish medallists are all excellent role models for our young people who aspire to achieve excellence and who realise that it can be within their grasp.

John Swinburne quoted Campbell Walsh in an interview with *The Scotsman* saying:

"I would happily be based in Scotland if there were the facilities, but to train at the top level in my sport you have to move to Nottingham."

I hope that in working up the national and regional networks of multisport facilities, the minister will keep in mind the need to have the most modern sports facilities that are as good as any in the world.

I have three brief points to make. First, sport improves the health of the nation. We know that

there is an alarmingly high rate of heart disease, stroke and cancer in certain areas of Scotland. A particular background factor is obesity; that was touched on by Donald Gorrie and Sylvia Jackson and Richard Lochhead spoke on that theme. Although it is acknowledged that improving the national diet has a beneficial effect, so do physical activity and sport. Indeed, healthy eating and exercise will make for a fitter, healthier work force and people who enjoy a higher quality of life and live longer.

Secondly, arising out of the need to address current poor levels of health among young people, there should be a stronger commitment to competitive sport in the Executive's sports strategy. Great benefits derive from competitive sport for young people to communities through the good health of those involved and the reduction of antisocial activities of all kinds.

Thirdly, encouraging excellence in sport will benefit Scotland and its economy enormously through increased employment caused by sports tourism. For example, the six nations rugby tournament had a considerable economic impact on Scotland and Edinburgh. Research showed that the immediate impact on the Scottish economy of each international match was substantial and was estimated to be at least £20 million, with £12 million going into the Edinburgh economy. Furthermore, overseas visitors were found to spend almost five times as much as Scottish residents.

Much has been planned by the minister and the Executive, but it would be helpful if, in his winding-up speech, the minister could tell us the current position on the national rock climbing centre at Ratho. The world youth climbing championships were held there earlier this month and more than 350 competitors from 30 nations attended the four-day event.

Earlier this year, in a reply to a question, the minister said:

"sportscotland is open-minded about trying to sustain the centre as a climbing centre."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2004; c 6847.]

We are aware that the centre has encountered a number of problems and it would be helpful if the minister could say how those have been or will be surmounted. I hope that the minister will make certain that funding gets through to where it is most needed and that sport will be at the forefront of his forward planning in the best interests of the nation.

11:19

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Sport is not just about achieving excellence or being active in school sports; it is about access to recreational

and play space. It is vital that we have safe spaces for children's spontaneous play. I well remember that when I was growing up I went out and played at being Daley Thompson or John McEnroe or Geoff Boycott or whoever was on the television, not because I had been told to and not because we had the sporting equipment or the sporting facilities to do it, but because that was what was on TV and that was what we felt like doing. Where are the spaces for that kind of spontaneous play now? Increasingly, our residential areas are designed for cars, not kids. Streets are for traffic, not for children playing on.

John Swinburne made a good point about the fact that if we design our streets for play, it will be possible to have a new generation who learn what they are good at and who learn, like me, that they are duff at cricket but good at other sports. That is the way forward in encouraging participation in sports.

The national strategy for sport—sport 21—states:

“the fastest-growing activities are ... those that occur in informal or family settings”,

while sports activities in formal settings have “largely remained static”. Does the minister accept that informal play settings are important to the overall sports participation agenda?

All too often, adults' use of public space is prioritised over children's. Too many signs in Scotland say “No ball games”. Research by the Children's Society found that while two thirds of children aged between seven and 16 like to play outside, 80 per cent say that they have been told off for doing so, and one in three say that, because of those telling-offs, they do not play outdoors any more. That is a real shame. Children are seen too often as a nuisance and too rarely as fellow citizens who can make a valuable contribution to the welfare of our community.

We need to encourage spontaneous play. I am talking in particular not about the back streets, but about the urban green spaces—the alternatives to playing on street corners. As John Swinburne outlined, we are experiencing a loss of urban green spaces, which is dramatically limiting opportunities for informal sports participation. Youngsters in my region who aspire to be the next Scottish Olympic gold medal winners may find that their football pitches or athletics track have been earmarked for housing, car parking or even—here in Edinburgh—a roads depot.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Mark Ballard: I am sorry, but I am short of time.

Entire communities lose out when green space vanishes. Amateur golfers cannot practise their swings, local children cannot be part of ever-

expanding football teams, people cannot play keepie-uppie, and those who enjoy a walk cannot go for one. Green spaces are being replaced with formal, organised recreation spaces. Five-a-side pitches that have to be booked are out of the reach of children. Formal play spaces are replacing informal play spaces. That is a loss. We should recognise that the provision of formal facilities cannot replace informal facilities.

In Edinburgh, the local authority-owned playing fields at Meggetland, which have already been mostly lost to development, are facing new proposals for underground car parking. Grass pitches will go and be replaced with one fenced, all-weather pitch. That will not make the loss good. St Augustine's RC High School's playing fields are sought after as the new home for the council's roads depot. Dreghorn polo fields face another bid for 47 luxury homes. All over my region, fields and informal play spaces are being lost.

Last month, Westminster's Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Charles Clarke, announced that playing fields will be sold off only as a last resort. Let us hope that the Government means it this time, and let us see similar measures become law here, not simply guidelines that can be overruled. Our nation deserves easily accessible, no-cost, informal recreation space. That is part of the basis of building a fit, sporting and successful Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I move to winding-up speeches, I remind members and members of the public that mobile phones must be switched off.

11:24

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): The motion is full of warm words and great intentions, so I will certainly vote for it—I am part of the independent group so I cannot speak for everybody else—but I take issue with it all the same. It states:

“That the Parliament recognises the significant progress made since devolution in increasing participation in sport.”

I am sure that the minister has access to the same figures as me, which show that since 1999 there has been a 2 per cent decrease in participation in sport. I do not blame the minister for that, but it would be better to acknowledge reality before we judge whether the policies that have been outlined are meeting the challenges.

Almost every member this morning has referred to the lack of resources, therefore our amendment is relevant, because we propose ways in which resources can be channelled into community sport and elite sport, but particularly into community sport.

Let us start with local authorities. I return to a familiar theme that members have heard me expound before. Having more physical education teachers in schools is a necessity. While I appreciate that the motion refers to that and that there is a target for more PE teachers to be in place by 2007, I am interested in how that will be achieved. The University of Edinburgh is the only place that trains PE teachers. I know that there is a postgraduate course at the University of Strathclyde, but I will not refer to that at the moment, as I am talking about people who are at school and who want to be PE teachers, who will likely go to Edinburgh in the first instance. The numbers in training at the University of Edinburgh are going to be down—not by much, but they will still be down—from 101 or 102 to 99, so the trend does not favour the Executive's good intentions. There is no way round the issue: education authorities must have the resources to employ more teachers.

Balerno High School has an inspirational head of PE called Jennifer Grassick. The community development of sporting activity in that area has come from the school and is feeding into local sporting clubs. Not only has the school taken responsibility for its pupils, but it is helping them to learn about organising sporting clubs. Whether she has twisted the arms of her fellow teachers or inspired them, Jennifer Grassick has persuaded them to help her to coach sports. Someone referred to the fact that teachers no longer do that on a voluntary basis. I believe that if teachers in the independent sector take sports, they get a 5 or 10 per cent addition to their salaries. I am not proposing that, but I am suggesting that without inspirational PE teachers such as Jennifer Grassick, other teachers will not be roped in.

Members have referred to the Government target of having two hours of PE a week, but that is not enough. If we seriously want people to think about sporting activity and exercise as part of their lives and as being as essential as taking in food, they have to participate in it every day. Some form of physical exercise has to be built into the school curriculum. My colleague Dennis Canavan referred to the McCrone settlement, which suggested replacing principal PE teachers with faculty heads. That is a backward step that is at variance with the Government's intentions. Could we examine that again?

The other aspect of having PE teachers in schools is that they carry sport into the community. We have to sort out how sportscotland can help. Until now, sportscotland has prioritised directing cash into sports clubs and communities, but I have queried that on more than one occasion, and I was interested to hear one or two members query it as well. Margaret Jamieson aptly mentioned a martial arts club that encourages kids in her area to take

part and become active, but which is denied the funding that it needs for expansion and promotion because it does not meet the priorities of sportscotland. There has been much discussion of that in the cross-party group on sport, and I pray that it will continue.

We must be careful that we do not appear to be narrow nationalists or, on the other hand, super internationalists, saying, "It's okay, we totally support the London Olympic bid." Look at what that will do to funding for the community development of sport. I, too, would like the Olympics to be held in London, but not at the expense of money that should be spent on encouraging mass participation in community sports. The priority should be to get more people into sports, which would give a bigger skills pool and so greater success at elite level.

While we are talking about elite athletes, I must say that I was not joking when I suggested that Colin Montgomerie should be invited to join us for the Parliament building opening ceremony. He has done more to boost Scottish self-confidence than anyone has recently. We need to get all the role models who have won medals, whether in the Olympics or the paralympics, into schools. After a Scot, Steven Frew, won the rings competition in gymnastics in the Commonwealth games in Manchester, I asked him whether he would be willing to visit Scottish schools. He said, "Of course. I already visit schools in London," but somehow we could not get organised to get him or other medal winners at the Commonwealth games into schools. For goodness' sake, we need to ensure that we get successful Olympians, including disabled Olympians, into schools now, because they are the sort of role models that we need.

11:31

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate. In doing so, I intend to use the expression "raise the game" only once—I believe that Mr McGrigor thinks that it refers to beaters going into a forest to make sure that the pheasants fly high enough. As I said in debates on sport in the previous chamber, anybody who was at school with me would fall about laughing at the notion of my taking part in such a debate.

The debate has been good and thoughtful. Although different views are expressed in the amendments to the motion, there is a good deal of consensus, which I welcome. This sort of considered, almost tutorial-like discussion is one of the things that the Parliament does best.

The minister said that sport boosts self-confidence and he talked about national and

regional sports facilities, an issue to which I will return. Michael Matheson, in a worthy speech, refused to be drawn into a discussion on stiletto heels, but he rightly flagged up the issue of heart disease and suggested that we need to broaden the notion of sport, a point that other members touched on. He also referred to indoor sports facilities, which is another matter to which I will return.

In an interesting speech, Jamie McGrigor seemed to advocate that smoking is not as bad for you as eating fatty foods. That is a debate for another day, but he was courageous to flag up the issue. Dennis Canavan made a good speech. I take his point. We shall probably return to the issue that he raised—the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

Donald Gorrie of the Liberal Democrats referred to the contribution that sport can make to local communities' morale. It is a pity that he is not with us now, but we need to flesh out what he and others have said and think about whether we are talking about revenue or capital funding, in the old local authority sense. There is a difference between the two. I suspect that he was referring to revenue funding, but, of course, such funding would not necessarily address the issue of indoor sports facilities. He also talked about the status of PE. There was something in his point that teachers who contribute to out-of-school activities are no longer recognised or supported as they used to be. If members consider the schools in their constituencies, they will see the truth in what he said.

Sylvia Jackson, Richard Lochhead and Brian Monteith made good speeches. Margaret Jamieson started to get into my territory when she talked about broadening the definition of sport, which is hugely important. I have my views on pugilism—I am afraid that boxing leads to brain damage—but the point was well made nevertheless. John Farquhar Munro, who was up next, touched on a similar point in talking about the recognition of various sports. John F talked about a young lady who does modern pentathlon and he mentioned horse riding. We also heard about polo fields, but I have forgotten from whom. Personally, I regard horses as extremely dangerous because one end bites and the other kicks, but there are aficionados of the sport who enjoy it.

Michael McMahon made one of the best speeches of the debate; in fact, it was one of the best speeches so far in the new Parliament building. To judge by the applause for his speech, members agree with that. The issue of accessibility for disabled people is crucial. I will not go into detail, because members know exactly where I am coming from on the issue. Near where

I live in the Highlands, there is a weekly swimming session for the disabled, but, as one would expect in the rural Highlands, the availability of transport cuts against the scheme. I know of people who could do with going to the sessions but who languish in their homes because there is nobody to take them. All the speakers in the debate hinted that an holistic approach is needed. I hate that expression, but we need to consider health, education and transport issues together.

Mark Ballard's point about green spaces was well made. There is no lack of green spaces where I live—although, depending on the time of year, they are sometimes brown spaces—but we lack indoor sports facilities. Provision is patchy. When the district councils were aggregated in 1996, some districts were ahead of others. For instance, Ross and Cromarty District Council had put a lot of capital expenditure into sports facilities, whereas Caithness District Council had not. Before the aggregation, district councils such as Ross and Cromarty rushed to complete buildings and hand them on to the successor authority, Highland Council. Unfortunately, because of spending restrictions, that situation has become somewhat preserved in aspic, which means that we have practically no indoor sporting facilities in the Caithness part of my constituency. We must consider what to do about that in the longer term. We cannot have facilities for citizens in some parts of the country, while other citizens simply do not have them. Whether those facilities should be charged for is an issue for another day.

Reference has rightly been made to medal winners. I salute their performances, but look at me: I am a guy who would never have won a medal in any sport whatever—

Karen Gillon: You still got elected.

Mr Stone: I thank the member for that comment—I trust that the *Official Report* will pick it up.

We need to remember the skinny, specky people such as me and the fatties and Michael McMahons who cannot touch their toes. [Laughter.] He said it. If we simply reward people who achieve, we will create a them-and-us situation in which the goodies—the guys who get medals—will be fine, whereas the people who are incapable of achieving such recognition will become couch potatoes and they are the people who could develop heart disease and cancer in later life.

11:37

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife (Con): One of the most attractive aspects about the Scots is their competitiveness. "Wha's like us? Damn few and they're a deid." Such harmless

bluster contains a grain of truth when one considers what Scots have achieved in many walks of life on many continents for many centuries. If the efforts of our national sporting heroes do not always live up to our aspirations, that makes it all the more pleasurable when Scots do well, as at this year's Olympics and paralympics. Of course, in the game that we gave to the world—golf—it is especially pleasing when Monty comes good, as he did in the Ryder cup.

That point is nowhere more true than with our national game of football, which I do not believe is in quite such a woeful state as Donald Gorrie suggested. Certainly, last night, a rejuvenated Aberdeen side was desperately unlucky at Pittodrie. There is every reason to believe the evidence that workplace productivity falls when the local football team loses. I have no difficulty in accepting Frank McAveety's claim that a more sporting Scotland will be a more successful Scotland. Michael Matheson, in a good speech, and Margo MacDonald, who is a former PE teacher, were correct to say that we still have a long way to go.

The debate has been good and wide ranging and has covered everything from our appalling national health record to the success of our tug-of-war team. We have heard the usual rhetoric of challenges and good intentions from the minister on behalf of the Executive, but, as with the arts, pouring more money into overlapping layers of bureaucracy, endless consultation papers and quangos too often provides more hot air and jobs for the boys and girls without necessarily doing anything meaningful for sport.

I come from St Andrews and belong to two golf clubs in that town, but I confess that I am probably the worst golfer that the place has ever produced. My excuse is that I played rugby during my formative years at Madras College. To judge from Stewart Stevenson's speech, I perhaps played to a marginally higher standard than he did at neighbouring Bell Baxter High School.

As a St Andean, I am of course delighted that the Executive spends £500,000 a year to encourage a new generation of Scots golfers, but despite the fact that, relatively, Scotland has more golf courses than anywhere in the world, there are even more Scots anglers than Scots golfers. We have some of the greatest salmon rivers in the world as well as quiet trout lochs and rivers on which everyone can fish. Angling contributes more than £100 million a year to Scottish tourism, yet only £90,000 is invested in marketing angling compared with the £700,000 that is spent on golf promotion.

Mr Stone: Is Mr Brocklebank telling us that angling will improve our health? Perhaps it will. I would be interested to know his thoughts on the matter.

Mr Brocklebank: I am saying that angling can improve our health, absolutely. I accept Jamie Stone's previous description of himself as not being totally expert in athletic matters, but I can tell him that, if he ever has to fight his way up a Highland stream or wrestle with a big salmon, he will know that angling can do something to improve people's health.

Conservatives welcome the active schools programme that the minister and Michael Matheson mentioned. I believe that the current problems with the Scottish rugby team date back to the undervaluing of teachers a generation ago. Dennis Canavan reminded us that in his day—and in mine—teachers willingly gave up their time to coach rugby and other sports outwith the normal curriculum. However, after years in which teachers have been undervalued and have felt unrewarded, that has fallen away. We must encourage teachers to become more involved again. In that regard, Donald Gorrie made a good point about teachers' extra-curricular activities being taken into account when they are interviewed for promotion.

I welcome the minister's commitment, in relation to the physical activity task force, that every child should have at least two hours of high-quality physical education a day, but I must point out that that is what my generation enjoyed all those years ago. Why has that not been a major priority since the Executive came to power?

Earlier, I talked about the competitive nature of the Scots. Sport is about competition, as Brian Monteith rightly said, even if that competition comes down to testing oneself against the elements, a river or a golf course. Life, too, is about competition. However, as Mark Ballard and John Swinburne pointed out, many Labour councils do not seem to have made the necessary link, given that they keep trying to sell off football and rugby pitches in this town and others.

I hope that the Executive is, albeit belatedly, recognising the importance of sport in preparing youngsters for life, as I believe that a more sporting Scotland will eventually bring about a more successful Scotland.

11:42

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Jamie Stone said that people who were at school with him would fall about laughing at the idea of his speaking in a debate on sports. I can tell him that my colleagues have been falling about laughing all week at the idea of my speaking in this debate. I think that it is a punishment for something that I have done wrong.

I never enjoyed sport as a child. In fact, I hated it. I thought that it was absolutely awful. I have great sympathy for children who do not enjoy what

we call sport. Earlier, Ted Brocklebank said that it was silly to say that sport is not competitive. I think that that is the nub of the issue. We have to make a distinction between competitive sport for athletes and activity, which can cover all sorts of things that are not competitive sport. People can be active and fit without taking part in sport.

Mr Brocklebank: I agree with what the member is saying, but does she accept that even the performance-improving business of testing oneself against a machine or measuring on a pedometer how many steps one takes in a day amounts to being in competition with oneself?

Linda Fabiani: I cannot think of anything that I would hate to do more than that, but I agree with Mr Brocklebank's point.

I should say that, despite not going in for competitive sport, I was quite a fit child and can still touch my toes.

Mr Stone: Show us.

Linda Fabiani: Some other time.

Jamie McGrigor and Margaret Jamieson talked about alternative ways of thinking of activity and sport that are outwith what generally happens in terms of compulsion in schools and so on. There are lots of different ways in which children and adults can be active and become fit.

Frank McAveety talked about increasing the participation base. As many members have noted, however, that means doing some work in relation to facilities. Mark Ballard and John Swinburne talked about parks and green spaces. Indoor facilities are also important. The selling off of school playing fields and the reduction in the size of school playgrounds is a problem that we need to address.

Sylvia Jackson and Michael Matheson talked about PPP projects in relation to ensuring that facilities were in place for communities to use. We hear that, in some cases, those facilities are being made available, but we need to consider revising existing contracts to improve the situation.

Michael Matheson mentioned the TASS initiative that runs south of the border. I have read about it and it strikes me as a sensible initiative that does not cost that much. It is designed to make it easier for young people to continue to pursue sporting careers after leaving school instead of letting that raw talent go to waste. The success that we have had with Scottish athletes and Scottish sports shows that we have a lot of raw talent in this country. However, only some of it is being tapped into.

Margo MacDonald: Does the member agree that the talent-spotting scheme that is operated by sportscotland is not hitting the mark because it is

not developed enough where children are at the age when their talent can be judged? Because the scheme focuses on children at too young an age, we are losing potentially talented athletes.

Linda Fabiani: I am sure that that is true and I suggest that the scheme could be revised with input from people who have studied the situation in detail.

The SNP agrees with Dennis Canavan's amendment, to which Margo MacDonald also spoke, because we believe that the issue comes down to resources. We can talk all that we like about the many improvements that can be made without extra resourcing but, if we really want to meet the targets that have been put in place, we will have to make resources available. It is interesting that the national governing bodies of sport that are funded by sportscotland have had no increase in funding in five years, because sportscotland does not have the necessary resources.

That brings me to the London Olympics bid, about which we heard from Michael Matheson and Margo MacDonald. Yes, it would be grand if our athletes could go and take part in the London Olympics, but sportscotland has said that, if it loses more than £40 million from lottery funds because of the London Olympics, it will have to end programmes that provide support to grass-roots and elite sport in Scotland. We have to consider the issue carefully. We await with interest further details of the funding arrangements for the implementation of the Olympics bid.

Some of what Elaine Murray said interested me, but I think that she has misunderstood the motion that is before the SNP conference. It is interesting to note that, at its conferences, the SNP takes motions and amendments from its members and forms policy on that basis. We do not go to conference with motions that will definitely become policy. The motion that Elaine Murray talked about will be debated, along with every other aspect of our policies.

Elaine Murray took the SNP to task for not mentioning the Executive's commitment to ensuring that there are two hours of compulsory sport a week in schools. However, much more is missed out of the Executive's motion than is missed out of the SNP's amendment. For example, although the physical activity task force had four strands—schools, homes, workplaces and communities—the Executive has mentioned only schools. Our amendment is much broader and more closely reflects the studies that have been done.

I will finish by agreeing with something that Elaine Murray said—one out of three ain't bad. She spoke about the volunteers who spend a

great deal of time participating in sport in communities and helping others to do so. They do a lot of grand work without pay. Most years, I manage to get along to the East Kilbride sports awards. I am always fascinated by the range of sporting activity that is available for all in my community and I am impressed by the number of people who freely give up a lot of their time every week to help to promote that. I salute those people as well as the wonderful Scottish athletes who have done us proud lately.

11:49

Mr McAveety: We have heard many positive speeches from members of all political parties and none about the fact that sport is an important element in our attempt to build a confident and accessible Scotland that is successful at the highest levels. In the time allotted, I will probably not be able to get through all the points that have been raised. I will try my best to identify the ones that I do not manage to mention in my summing up and respond directly to the members who raised them.

It is important to clarify a couple of issues on which Michael Matheson focused. He asked about the talented athletes scholarship scheme that was announced by the DCMS in England. It is intriguing that the SNP has examined a model from England and says that it is importable to Scotland. However, I do not think that the scheme is necessarily applicable to Scotland, because we already have, in our talented athletes programme, our area institutes and the national institute, programmes that support and develop athletes. I welcome the fact that the DCMS is catching up with Scotland.

Michael Matheson's second point was about the audit of the swimming pool estate and the indoor sports facilities estate. I have already given an assurance in a parliamentary answer that a report on the matter will be made available to the Parliament, by the end of autumn, I hope, but certainly into the early months of winter. I guarantee that it will inform much of the debate that we need about the estate. The matter is about not just the Executive's responsibility for estate development, but how we pull together the partnerships that will address the issues. I assure the Parliament that we will make progress on that.

Members from all parts of the chamber mentioned the Ratho quarry investment. A meeting took place this week that included officials from sportscotland and the local MSP, Margaret Smith, and I hope that some progress will be made from those deliberations. As members are aware, there is a combination of investment from the Executive and other agencies, as well as commercial investment, so we must treat the

discussions sensitively. However, the Executive is keen to ensure that the facility is retained and developed. A number of national governing bodies use the facility, so it is in our interests to try to sustain it. If people and their families have not seen it or had the opportunity to participate, I recommend it to them. It is a wonderful new asset that has been developed in the recent past.

I reassure members from all parts of the chamber who made points about the debate on PE in schools. We know that we want to make substantial progress, but I remember that, in previous debates in the Parliament, members bemoaned the fact that we did not have a strategy on activity in schools. Through a combination of the active schools programme, the sports co-ordinators programme and the development that Peter Peacock has announced, we have given a commitment to ensuring that there is good-quality PE provision. Having spoken to a number of senior staff in schools, and having been a teacher in schools, I know that, although we could put things on the curriculum, the important point is the quality of support and development. We could say that there should be two hours of PE, but if it is of poor quality the children and youngsters will not be persuaded that they should continue with the activity beyond their school lives. I want to ensure that we make progress on that.

It was ironic to hear some of the comments from the Conservatives. I understand the desire for a bipartisan approach, but much of the debate in the 1980s was about the polarisation between the Government and schools. The impact of that was reflected in how teachers felt about their work load. As an individual who was involved in the process both as a trade unionist and as a teacher, I saw the benefit of extra-curricular sports activity. I hope that we are making progress on retrieving some of the ground that was lost during that period, which was detrimental.

Rhona Brankin: I welcome the increase in the number of hours of PE in our schools. Does the minister agree that a distinctive feature of a good school is what goes on outside the conventional hours of 9 to 4? Does he agree that the curriculum review must consider what goes on in extra-curricular activities?

Mr McAveety: Peter Peacock has given an assurance that, as part of our commitment to the provision of additional PE teachers and our commitment to two hours of PE activity in the curriculum, there will be a substantial monitoring strategy to address the issue that the member raises. I assure her that that will be part of the broader debate about the role that extra-curricular activity can play in the development of individuals, both personally and educationally.

Sylvia Jackson asked what we are doing about tennis development in Scotland; Brian Monteith

raised the same issue in what was, if I may say so, a sterling performance. I assure them that we will provide £500,000 to ensure that there will be two additional indoor courts and two outdoor clay courts to improve the facilities. We must also recognise that, for people such as Andrew Murray to continue to succeed, it is important for them to have experience of training and development not only in Scotland, but outside Scotland. To compete at the very top level, players need the peer group of competition that is provided through that international activity and I assure members that we want to make progress on that.

It is important for members of the Executive to continue to collaborate on budgets. I welcome the commitment from overall health spending to the active schools programme. Money that would have been allocated to health was factored across, which is a positive step.

Mr Stone: The minister will be aware that I have corresponded with him several times on Embo football club, which is a tiny club in a remote part of the Highlands. It appears that, because of red tape and rules and regulations, sportscotland cannot put in the money that is desperately needed. Will the minister concede that we must do some work on the co-ordination of different funding sources?

Mr McAveety: Members made valuable contributions on how we should streamline applications and I want to take that forward from the debate. On regional developments, there is a major issue about ensuring that areas that are disconnected from substantial centres of population have the opportunity to find ways forward. I am happy to discuss that with the member.

Margaret Jamieson raised a number of important issues about the development of national and regional sports facilities and of new sports that are not recognised at present. I will be pulling together a meeting of the three councils in Ayrshire to address the issue. I gave Margaret Jamieson and the MP for Kilmarnock and Loudoun that commitment when I met them a number of months ago. I will continue to work towards achieving that commitment and I hope that we can pull a partnership together, as that would be a welcome development. On the recognition of minor sports, I note that the home country sporting councils identify the criteria for recognising sports. Debates will continue to take place on the matter and I will explore further the points that Margaret Jamieson has raised.

Two other substantial issues that came through in the debate are local access and informal play. The planning section of the Executive will, through the planning guidelines, address the amount of space that is available in communities for informal

play. Mark Ballard raised that issue and spoke about it reasonably. However, I do not think that it is acceptable to claim that, if we reduce the number of certain kinds of playing fields, we diminish the quality of the environment for sport. I have no nostalgia for either red blaes or black ash, which were regular features of the sporting environments that contributed to the excellent quality of my football ability. The debate that sportscotland has with local authorities is about how, if there is a new development, we should build that into community planning and planning outlines in relation to sports strategies for wider communities.

I do not want to intrude on Michael McMahon's contribution on physical activity. I say to him that I do not think that the problem is going down to touch one's toes; the big challenge is getting back up afterwards. In his area of North Lanarkshire, pioneering schemes are taking place in schools, particularly with the development of sports comprehensives and partnerships with local authorities. Again, we can continue to make substantial developments with those.

A number of members raised issues about major events. We in Scotland have had some success in attracting major events. We will have to reserve judgment about the 2012 Olympics and other events until we see the criteria that are set by the governing bodies and until we know what our national sporting body considers to be an appropriate response. Our experience from the 2008 bid will influence and shape our perspective on that. We need to make parallels with bids that we might consider for other projects.

Margo MacDonald talked about celebrating winners. We already have sporting champions going into schools and I will continue to develop that programme, because it is important for successful athletes, including those who were in Athens recently, to inspire youngsters. A point was made about recognition for Colin Montgomerie in relation to the opening of the new Parliament building. I believe that he has a major golf match on that day and that he therefore cannot attend the opening, but an invitation was offered to him. I am sure that he will be recognised at some time in due course.

Since 1999, there have been substantial changes. Of course, the Parliament aspires for more. There have been major developments since devolution and they are commendable. In my opinion, they would not have happened without devolution and they have been a tribute to the politicians in the chamber. I hope that, as well as building a new Parliament building, we are building a sporting Scotland that will have success in the future. I hope that members will support the motion.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Cabinet (Meetings)

1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP): I know that this is becoming a bit of a tradition, but I start by congratulating Colin Montgomerie on sinking the winning putt in the Ryder cup. I am sure that all members in the chamber will agree that it was a stunning performance.

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-1072)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): One thing that we will discuss is how to recognise the efforts not just of Colin Montgomerie, but of those paralympians who have made fantastic efforts simply in competing—although those who have won medals deserve particular congratulations—in the current paralympics. They do themselves, their families and their countries proud.

At next Wednesday's meeting of the Cabinet, we will discuss how we can best take forward any potential bid that Scotland might make for the Commonwealth games in 2014. This evening, the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland will meet to choose between Glasgow and Edinburgh for the preferred bid from Scotland. A period of about six to nine months will then be needed to assess that bid. If the preferred city is chosen, we will be centrally involved in that. We have a strong vision that Scotland should host the Commonwealth games at some stage in the near future. However, if we are to do that, unlike in 1986 we will do it properly, we will do it well and we will make Scotland proud.

Nicola Sturgeon: I share the First Minister's ambition in that regard. I also agree that watching the paralympics is an absolute inspiration.

The First Minister made the following simple commitment in the Scottish Executive's partnership agreement. The first line of its first paragraph states:

"Growing the economy is our top priority."

In light of that statement, does the First Minister share my concern that businesses in Scotland pay a higher level of business rates than businesses south of the border do? Does he have any plans to cut business rates to help the Scottish economy to flourish and grow?

The First Minister: Businesses in Scotland do not pay a higher rate of business rates than businesses south of the border pay. The calculation based on the rate poundage in

Scotland produces an equivalent take. In fact, given that on two occasions in the past three years the Executive's decisions have reduced the proportion of business rates, I think that we have put the majority of Scotland's businesses at a competitive advantage in comparison with their colleagues south of the border.

We will announce the direction for our decisions on business rates for next year, the year after and the year after that in the spending review statement next week. The detail of those decisions will be announced in the normal course of events in November and December later this year.

Nicola Sturgeon: Scottish business pays more. That is a statement of fact. I find the First Minister's answer very interesting. The end of his answer was illuminating because it is not quite what his own office says about that policy. Perhaps I will return to that later.

In the meantime, I remind Mr McConnell of the commitment that he gave last year to be open and transparent and to accept new ideas wherever they came from. Let me ask him about another policy idea. I want to see a non-means-tested citizens pension to tackle the scandal of pensioner poverty in Scotland. Will the First Minister speak up for Scotland's pensioners by asking the United Kingdom Government to examine that proposal?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The issue is vaguely reserved, but Mr McConnell may proceed.

The First Minister: Sorry, Presiding Officer, what did you say?

The Presiding Officer: We may be straying into reserved matters.

The First Minister: In answer, I point out that Mr MacAskill, who is not here but who sits on Ms Sturgeon's front bench—or, more accurately, on Mr Salmond's front bench—is reported in today's newspapers as supporting not just means-tested pensions but means-tested access to the health service and to a number of other benefits and services, too. Given that Ms Sturgeon and I have agreed that we are in the process of raising our game and, I hope, of developing a national consensus in Scotland on such issues, I suggest that Ms Sturgeon should start by developing that consensus on her own front bench. Mr MacAskill—he is not here today, but he normally sits on her right-hand side—supports means testing not just for pensions but for the health service and for benefits. Will Miss Sturgeon back her shadow justice minister? Or is there a lack of consensus on the Scottish National Party front bench?

Nicola Sturgeon: It is little wonder that people in Scotland are fed up with politics when politicians like the First Minister cannot give straight answers

to questions. I have in my hands an analysis of my SNP leadership election manifesto, which the First Minister's office has produced. The analysis suggests pre-empting the SNP's plans to cut business tax, and the First Minister's office is so enamoured of our plan for the citizen's pension that it suggests that the Secretary of State for Scotland's right-hand man, Iain Gray, might want to cost it. In addition, the analysis suggests that a range of other SNP policy ideas might be worth considering.

Let me ask the First Minister this: is he willing to make good his pledge to be open and transparent, and to accept good ideas wherever they come from? Clearly, his office thinks that the SNP ideas are good ideas. Or is the First Minister intent, as he has been today, on putting petty, party-political point scoring over the national interest?

The First Minister: I am afraid that one of the aspects of leadership that Nicola Sturgeon will have to learn is consistency, which is absolutely vital across the SNP front bench as well as in what is said from week to week. We need to have consistency. We need to know what the SNP's policy is.

I absolutely support a non-means-tested basic pension for people in this country. I also support, as the SNP does not, targeted support for the poorest pensioners who need it. I will absolutely support the continuation of the targeted additional allowances and benefits that pensioners in Scotland now have, which have seen at least a third of pensioners being taken out of poverty in the past seven years and which will see many more taken out of poverty in the years to come.

I will continue to support the good work that has been done in this Parliament, with our powers, for pensioners in Scotland, such as the central heating programmes, the free personal care for the elderly and the free bus travel. We will say some more about that next week. Those are the policies for pensioners that this Parliament has supported, complementing the action of the United Kingdom Government, so that two Governments are working together consistently, building a national consensus to ensure that pensioners are well respected, given dignity and supported throughout Scotland and elsewhere.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues he will discuss with him. (S2F-1074)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no plans for a formal meeting with the Prime Minister.

David McLetchie: I thank the First Minister for that answer. I am sure that he would like to join

me in extending a welcome to the Parliament to the campaigners from West Lothian who are trying to prevent the loss of vital services from St John's hospital. As I am sure the First Minister is aware, that is a matter for which the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive have responsibility, unlike the things that the Scottish National Party wants to talk about.

Will the First Minister confirm that St John's hospital was opened in 1990 under a Conservative Government, built up under the Conservatives and is now being run down by Labour? Is it not the case that Labour's cuts are real cuts, that they are really hurting in communities in Scotland and that the national health service in Scotland is certainly not safe in Malcolm Chisholm's hands? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order. I simply say to the public gallery that we do not have applause from the gallery.

The First Minister: I welcome the campaigners—who, as I have said before, are very welcome in this Parliament—not just those from West Lothian, but those from Argyll and Clyde, who are also here to make representations on behalf of their local health services and to relay their concerns to us.

I suspect that there is nobody in this Parliament who is more aware than I am of the importance of the accident and emergency department in St John's hospital. Members will recall, just 15 or 16 months ago, me having perhaps an over-display of emotion in the chamber when I described how the fantastic staff in that hospital saved my nephew's life. Therefore, I take the situation in St John's hospital in West Lothian very seriously indeed.

It is entirely appropriate that Lothian NHS Board consult at this moment on the best provision of acute services throughout the Lothians. I want our Minister for Health and Community Care to ensure—and he will—that the recommendations that we receive from Lothian NHS Board undergo the most robust scrutiny possible and that the needs and concerns not only of West Lothian, but of the populations of Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian, are taken on board when a final decision is made.

The decisions are not easy, but there cannot be a policy of no change. There must be improvements and progress in our health service, but those decisions must be taken seriously and patient care must be at the centre of the rationale that we use. Increasingly, we need to see beyond the boundaries of the individual health boards; that is as true in the Lothians as it must be in the west of Scotland. I am increasingly coming to the view that there are far too many health boards in Scotland, and that, in the east, west and north of

Scotland, co-ordination of provision is a problem partly because of the fact that the artificial health board boundaries cause difficulties between health board areas.

I am sorry that that was a long answer, Presiding Officer, but the situation is complex and needs rational thought. I hope that, in the decisions that we make on the Lothians, we take on board the wider issues in the Borders, Fife, and perhaps even in central Scotland and Lanarkshire, just as we must take on board the wider concern throughout the west of Scotland in any decisions that are made in Argyll and Clyde.

David McLetchie: I am sure that that answer will have given some hope or comfort to people from West Lothian, but, as the First Minister is aware, the situation in St John's hospital is far from an isolated case. What about Caithness general hospital, which was built by the Conservatives and cut by Labour? What about Ayr hospital, which was built by the Conservatives and cut by Labour? What about Queen Margaret hospital in Dunfermline, which was built by the Conservatives and cut by Labour?

Why is that happening? I put it to the First Minister that it is happening because of Labour's centralisation of our health service. His comment about cutting the number of health boards goes in precisely the wrong direction. Will the First Minister confirm that it was the merger of NHS trusts in 1999, which was supported at Westminster by Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP, and the complete abolition of those trusts in this Parliament, which was supported by Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP and opposed by only the Scottish Conservatives, that led to a loss of local control and to the centralisation of services that we are now seeing throughout Scotland?

The First Minister: I try to be rational about such matters. I understand the concerns that exist at a local level and do not want to minimise those concerns. Where it is appropriate for the Minister for Health and Community Care to make decisions, he will take on board local concerns and ensure that the analysis of, and recommendations in, decisions that are proposed to him are robust.

However, it is simply wrong to describe the situation as Mr McLetchie does. For example, there is an issue in Vale of Leven hospital, but there is also a brand new dialysis unit that was opened in May, which is an indication of our commitment to the future of health services in that area. There are issues in various centres throughout Scotland in which the technical specialisation of services might be appropriate to secure the highest possible quality of care for individual patients, but in each case, I want further

services to be decentralised to the local community. That is precisely why we have had 67 new or modernised hospitals since the Parliament was first established in 1999 and 59 more will be completed between now and 2007. It is why we have modernised 104 local health centres since 1999 and a further 54 will be modernised between now and 2006. We are opening and growing health centres and local health facilities throughout Scotland, because the nature of care is changing.

One thing has really changed since 1999: the balance between the staff and the senior management. I will give Mr McLetchie an acute example of that—I was going to use the example later in answer to Mr Morgan's question, but I hope that he will not mind if I use it now. The number of senior managers in the health service, which rocketed under the Tories with all their health service bureaucracy during their 18 years in power, has reduced by 16 per cent since 1999. The number of ambulance service staff has increased by 16 per cent. That is the sort of change that the people of Scotland want and it is the sort of change that we will continue.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): I was encouraged by the remarks that the First Minister made in his initial response to Mr McLetchie, when he said that the views of people in West Lothian—indeed, in the whole of the Lothians—will be taken into account fully in the changes that are proposed by NHS Lothian.

To date, NHS Lothian, by saying that the problem is due to training inadequacies in St John's hospital, has been trying to hide behind the views of the postgraduate dean. However, the postgraduate dean advised me and my colleague Robin Cook that he would have been perfectly satisfied for St John's to be one of two emergency surgical sites in the Lothians. In the light of that advice, will the First Minister ask Malcolm Chisholm to require NHS Lothian properly to consult on the issue and not to refuse to consult, as it is currently doing?

The First Minister: I will not comment on conversations that I was not party to, but it is important that politicians do not interfere in clinical decisions. When those decisions are made on clinical grounds, it is important that politicians do not try to second-guess those who have that responsibility. Those who have that responsibility also have a responsibility to take their decisions in a serious manner that has an overview of the whole area concerned. Malcolm Chisholm—and the chair of the health board, as far as I am aware—is checking that part of the process to ensure that that decision was made on proper grounds and can be properly justified.

It is important that we have a proper debate in the Lothians about the future of acute services.

Even under the proposal for St John's hospital, which I understand, in the case of the local members and the local community, might be controversial, there would still be a full, 24/7 accident and emergency department and observation ward in St John's; there would still be full acute medical admissions, including a coronary care unit; and there would still be a series of other services. We need to have an open and transparent discussion about that, to determine the best health care for the 21st century and put patients at the centre of that, and we all need to be willing, as Ms Sturgeon correctly said, to listen to the new ideas that might have to be adopted.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland and what issues he intends to discuss. (S2F-1062)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): I have no plans for a formal meeting with the Secretary of State.

Robin Harper: When the First Minister next meets the Secretary of State, I have no doubt that they will discuss the G8 summit that is taking place next year in Scotland. Prime Minister Blair has said that climate change should be an urgent priority. Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister: Yes, I certainly do.

Robin Harper: Why, then, do the latest annual Scottish environment statistics, published this week, show that Scotland's greenhouse gas pollution is increasing? Why is road traffic up a further 1 per cent? Why does the First Minister continue to press ahead with the building of the M74 extension, which will only increase traffic levels and increase climate-wrecking pollution? Does the First Minister agree that he needs to raise the game on climate change, not raise pollution; to give vision and leadership at G8 rather than green spin; and to set a real example, instead of the almost comical and frankly embarrassing gloss that is presently proposed for the G8 summit?

The First Minister: Although the main content of the G8 summit will be based around the work of the commission for Africa and the need to deal with global aid and development, part of that is to ensure that that development is sustainable. We cannot have sustainable development if we continue to pollute our atmosphere to the levels that we currently do and if we continue to fail, as many countries do, including the United States of America in particular, to take appropriate action to tackle that pollution. I am certain that not just I, but the British Government, in the run-up to the G8

summit, will raise those matters publicly, and with the American Government in particular. We need to see change throughout the world if we are going to tackle the deterioration of our climate and the threat to our world. Here in Scotland, we need to play our part in that and to make our contribution. That is precisely why the Executive, in the past five years, has made a significant shift in transport investment from private transport to public transport; that shift will be confirmed in the budget that will be announced by Mr Kerr next Wednesday.

Care Homes (Standards)

4. Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Executive is taking to address recent reports on standards in care homes. (S2F-1069)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): The establishment of the care commission with national care standards and improved care for the elderly have been among the achievements of devolution for Scotland. We expect care providers to meet the standards that have been set and ministers will continue to act to ensure that they deliver on that.

Michael McMahon: I welcome the First Minister's answer. I am sure that he is aware that residents returned to the Rosepark nursing home in Fallside in my constituency this month. Will he join me in welcoming that development and recall that commitments were made to ensuring confidence in the residential care sector following the tragedy in January? Will he therefore ensure that the recent reports into standards in care homes will not be viewed as a cup half full and that the failings that have been found in half Scotland's care homes—some of which have been exemplified in media campaigns such as that in the *Daily Record*—will be considered to be an intolerable situation that he will recommit to addressing?

The First Minister: We will certainly take further action on that. Ministers have worked before and since the publication of those reports to take further action. We will act to close the loophole that means that the care commission is not allowed to inspect and approve agencies that employ staff who might be used in care homes. Michael McMahon is right to say that one of our national newspapers highlighted that matter, which has received attention.

We will also take other action. Until recently, the care commission charged for copies of its national care standards. The cost was one excuse that care home owners gave for not having a copy of those standards. We will remove that excuse by sending them copies free. We also want to ensure

that clients are in control of the process. We are discussing with social work directors how we can ensure that clients have, at the time of assessment, information on the care standards that they can expect, so that they can complain and report to the care commission if care homes let them down.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that the First Minister agrees that key to the quality of care in our care homes is the quality of staff, and that Disclosure Scotland's role is therefore central. I refer him to the written answer that was given to my colleague Richard Lochhead in August, which revealed the 100 per cent failure to meet the target that 90 per cent of basic applications through Disclosure Scotland should be processed within six calendar weeks. Will the First Minister comment on that failure and on the fact that care homes are now employing some staff without undergoing those procedures?

The First Minister: I share Christine Grahame's concern about Disclosure Scotland with regard to the position that prevailed at the beginning of the summer. That is why ministers have received, every week of the past few months, a written report from Disclosure Scotland on the progress that it has made towards not only meeting a target, but reducing the number of outstanding applications. I think that something like 20,000 applications were outstanding at the beginning of the summer and that that figure is down to about 4,000, but I am happy to write to Christine Grahame with the details. The significant improvement that was made in July, August and September is only the first step towards ensuring that Disclosure Scotland can turn round those applications as speedily as possible.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): Michael McMahon asked what action the First Minister will take on the care home sector. When will the First Minister meet care home providers to discuss with them the delay in implementing their current contract, which means that many of them are trying to offer full-scale care at less than its cost? That is the basis of many of the problems. Will he agree today to meet them?

The First Minister: Ministers are in regular contact with all those who have an interest in the sector. We discuss not only finance matters, but the standards that are employed in care homes. I hope that David Davidson's comments show a slight change in his approach and that he will not only back private care home providers, but insist on the same standards on which we insist.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Does the First Minister agree that to maintain high standards of care, privately run homes and council-run homes should have a level playing field on funding?

The First Minister: The allocation of finance sometimes reflects the quality of care in those homes, which is the point that is consistently made. Working in both directions would be possible and it would be wrong of local authorities to reduce their quality of care. There is a need to continue to revise the budget—we will say more about that in our spending review statement next week—and to ensure that the proper resources are allocated. There is also a need for proper decision making, at local authority level, on the level of service that is provided locally and the quality and quantity of places that are available. It is also important that we continue to drive up standards in the private care home sector and the voluntary care home sector and that we finance that accordingly.

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): Does the First Minister agree that the treatment of elderly residents on the sudden closure of care homes—most recently in Bearsden, Fort William and Edinburgh, which involved inadequate notice being given and very little or no suitable alternative accommodation being provided—is disgraceful and contravenes the national care standards? What action will the Executive take to resolve the crisis in the care home sector?

The First Minister: Again, we must get the balance right between local and national responsibilities. We want to set national standards and continue to pursue them, but we also want to ensure that each local authority in Scotland meets its responsibilities. In a free society, it is not possible to regulate such matters entirely, but we must do all that we can to ensure that private or voluntary providers of care home places meet their responsibilities and treat their residents with the dignity that they deserve. People who close care homes without proper notice being given and who treat elderly citizens with the disdain that has been seen, or which has at least been perceived, in recent incidents need to reconsider the way in which they practise their business. We certainly want to do all that we can to urge those people to improve their practices and, where possible through the national standards, to get commitments in advance that such things will not happen.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Resources)

5. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether adequate resources are available to the Scottish Ambulance Service, given consequential effects of changes elsewhere in the NHS. (S2F-1079)

Given what the First Minister said earlier, I assume that he has a second answer up his sleeve.

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):

Earlier, I made a point about the number of staff in the ambulance service in Scotland increasing by 16 per cent in the five years of devolution. We have also increased funding to the Scottish Ambulance Service by 13 per cent, to £128 million a year. Last year, the service was able to train 168 paramedics to the new standard, and 66 technicians. Those are considerable improvements, which I am sure that we will build on in the years to come.

Alasdair Morgan: Of course, it is not only the absolute level of resources that is important—the match of those resources against demand is important, too. In Dumfries and Galloway, there have been two serious cases in the past couple of weeks that have raised grave concerns about ambulance cover. In one case, a patient had to wait three hours in the general practitioner's surgery after the GP had phoned for an emergency ambulance. The patient was then driven 50 miles by her husband to hospital, where she underwent a four-hour emergency operation. I do not expect the First Minister to comment on an individual case, but will he admit that the ambulance service is under severe pressure at the moment? Will he further concede that changes to out-of-hours services and hospital closures in some areas could well stretch the service to breaking point? Will he personally ensure that the Minister for Health and Community Care gets a grip of the problem?

The First Minister: I am always wary of any attempt to exploit serious individual cases for political gain and hope that that is not the case in this instance. The two cases to which Mr Morgan refers were potentially serious and must be properly investigated by those who are responsible. I understand that both cases are being investigated and I will ensure that the Minister for Health and Community Care receives a report on both and writes to Mr Morgan with the analysis that is provided.

On the general issue, it is undeniable that the number of staff in the ambulance service has increased significantly and that the equipment that they use and the service that they can provide have improved dramatically in the five years of devolution. Critically, the Scottish Ambulance Service is now centrally involved at a local level in discussing with GPs and others involved the provision of out-of-hours services in a way that did not apply in the past, when GP surgeries had that responsibility and were obliged voluntarily to provide those services. A proper service can now be provided throughout Scotland, with the right arrangements in place and with GPs, the Ambulance Service and others working together. That should be an improvement in the service, not

a deterioration, and we will monitor the situation in each part of Scotland as it develops.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

6. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive is prepared for the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 fully coming into force. (S2F-1064)

The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell): Yes, we are. Executive departments and agencies are preparing for the 1995 act coming fully into force on 1 October. We take our responsibilities under the act, as an employer and as a service provider, very seriously. We expect all employers and service providers in Scotland to do the same.

Mike Pringle: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which comes into force next week, is an important piece of legislation for social inclusion. Will the First Minister ensure that all service providers are aware of their responsibility to comply with the 1995 act and that the legislation is promoted as a positive opportunity, rather than as an obligation?

The First Minister: Mike Pringle's last point is a strong and positive one. Throughout Scotland, there are businesses and organisations in the public sector and elsewhere that are concerned about the 1995 act and see it as a threat to their position. If there is any truth in the statistics showing that one in five Scots has some form of disability or long-term illness, every business and organisation in Scotland should see the act as a positive opportunity to improve the work of their business and to improve their relationship with customers and potential customers. We will certainly ensure that people are aware of the act and that they are being encouraged to follow it properly. We will give every assistance that we can to the United Kingdom Government to ensure that the act is being implemented properly.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My point of order, which concerns rule 13.7 of our standing orders, refers to the length of time that has been taken for this question session. Do you consider it in order that 60 per cent of the time that was available today was given over to the party leaders? That meant that you had to run over time to ensure that the last question—that of Mr Pringle—was taken. Last week, Mr Mundell lost his question. I ask you for a statement on whether we might better organise how questions are put to the First Minister.

The Presiding Officer: I am always hesitant about giving homilies, particularly to party leaders, but I have some sympathy with what you say, Ms MacDonald. You are quite right, in that rule 13.7.8

says that supplementary questions should be kept brief. It is silent on the subject of answers. As the First Minister has made clear, there are occasions—as in the case of national health service hospitals—on which a long answer is required in the public interest. In general, however, if the party leaders' questions and the answers to them are kept short, there will be more time for more questions and answers. That will free up time for that very important constituency in this Parliament—back benchers. It is their chance to question the First Minister.

12:33

Meeting suspended until 14:00.

14:00

On resuming—

Question Time

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Environment and Rural Development

Fishing (Days at Sea)

1. Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what the prospects are of an improved agreement being negotiated for next year from that secured at last year's European Union fishing negotiations, particularly in respect of the number of days at sea. (S2O-3312)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): I regret to say that it is not possible at this stage to speculate on the prospects for the negotiations in advance of the official advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, which is expected by the end of October.

Mr Brocklebank: I thank the minister for his answer. Can he tell us whether the two extra days at sea, which he announced as something of a triumph back in April, will be granted retrospectively given that the Council of Ministers, which must ratify those additional days, will not meet until mid-October? Can he offer any prospect of those days being released now to give hard-pressed Scottish fishermen a chance to use them before the year is out?

Ross Finnie: As I understand it, there is every prospect that the extra days may not necessarily have to go to an agriculture and fisheries council. I am advised that it is possible, given the agreement that has been reached, that the matter could be treated as an A-point at any fisheries council meeting. I very much hope that that is the case.

I certainly did not announce the two extra days with any great triumph. We expressed great frustration that a matter that should certainly have been dealt with months ago was taking this length of time. As to whether the days will apply retrospectively, I would not wish to say that that will be the case. It was my understanding that the regulation as tabled would be retrospective. However, I am bound to say that, as always in such matters, I would wish to see the text that is published by the European Commission before confirming that position.

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): The minister will be aware that there is a strong and irrefutable case for an increase now in the west

coast prawn fishing quota. Can he guarantee that that will be one of the priorities that he will pursue in the December talks at the fisheries council?

Ross Finnie: I certainly agree with the member that the case for increased total allowable catches in certain areas, including the west coast nephrops area, is very strong. We have put that matter firmly to the Commission. It is our position, as always, that when firm scientific advice indicates that the evidence is such that we can argue for an increased quota, we will certainly so argue.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

2. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what training and advice it will give farmers and crofters ahead of the introduction of the single farm payment scheme so that they are fully informed of cross-compliance requirements. (S2O-3303)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): The Executive will issue an advisory information leaflet on cross-compliance in mid-October to all farmers and crofters. That will be followed up by a series of regional meetings later in the year, which will be similar to the meetings that were held during the consultation period. The Executive, in consultation with industry stakeholders, will keep the need for further advice and training under review.

John Farquhar Munro: I thank the minister for that helpful response. I am sure that the minister will know of the extreme concern that the Environment and Rural Development Committee expressed regarding the lack of available advice on cross-compliance measures. Crofters and farmers have raised fears with me that they will not know what is expected until the first farm inspections have been carried out. Does the minister agree that, until professional advice is given regarding the practicalities of how to comply with the new single farm payment, crofters and farmers should not have to incur penalties for non-compliance?

Ross Finnie: I wholly agree with the thrust of what the member said. It is important that all crofters and farmers understand the regulations; indeed, that is why we have prepared the leaflet and are issuing it to them. I stress that the regional meetings to which I referred are being arranged in conjunction with NFU Scotland and the Scottish Crofting Foundation. I hope very much that we will not get to a position where crofters and farmers have to await the first inspection before they are fully apprised of the requirements under cross-compliance.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Does the minister acknowledge that in this period

of radical change for the farming and crofting industry it is inevitable that there will be an on-going requirement for advice and training to be made available? Does he acknowledge that there is already a strong body capable of providing that training in both the machinery rings of Scotland and the private sector?

Ross Finnie: I certainly acknowledge Alex Johnstone's point that there are clearly a large number of changes. However, returning briefly to the issue raised by John Farquhar Munro, I am bound to say that although the assembly and detail of some of those regulations have changed, we should not give the impression that a raft of new regulations has been introduced; rather, there are one or two additions that are important in relation to the new single farm payment. A substantial body of the regulations are existing regulations. I take the point about the continuing need to keep crofters and farmers fully apprised of the details of the big changes that are taking place and I am well aware of the availability of external bodies to provide advice.

Sewerage and Water Services (Scottish Borders)

3. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are being taken to accelerate sewerage and water provision in the Scottish Borders in order that housing can be built. (S2O-3279)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): As the member will be aware, a total of £1.8 billion is being invested in upgrading our water and waste water system. That represents a higher level of investment per household than that under way in England and Wales. In the current investment programme, some £200 million will provide positive benefits towards current constraints and a further £41 million is being allocated to deal with development constraints and first-time connection issues in rural areas.

Where development constraints exist, which I readily acknowledge, I expect Scottish Water, to which I have spoken, to work with all parties—local authorities, Communities Scotland and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and its regulators—to identify practical solutions that will allow developments to proceed where possible.

Looking to the future, I recently commissioned a thorough and comprehensive assessment of the investment requirements for the industry. That work has informed my recent consultation, "Investing in Water Services 2006-2014" and I hope that all members and interested parties will participate fully in the consultation process.

Christine Grahame: I thank the minister for that helpful answer. As he is aware, in Peebles, Lauder and elsewhere in the Borders, there has been a 40 per cent increase in applications for social housing and yet we cannot build because of water and sewerage problems. I refer the minister to his consultation paper where local authorities predicted that, up to 2014, they could accommodate 230,000 houses, but half of them cannot be built because of sewerage and water problems. I appreciate that the minister is making representations to Scottish Water, but the matter is of such urgency that Scottish Water needs strong political direction to—if I may use a dreadful pun—undo the blockage.

Ross Finnie: We will forgive that pun on this occasion. I hope that Christine Grahame understands that there are two real problems here. Although local authorities have identified problems going forward to 2014, one of the difficulties is that when we were drawing up the major investment programme, sadly almost none of those consulted in 1999-2000 brought the issue of that kind of development constraint to the fore. Therefore a capital programme was designed principally to meet regulatory and statutory requirements. The programme is under way; we cannot suddenly turn capital programmes on or off. As the minister, I cannot suddenly decide that I am going to intervene and suggest that Scottish Water does not meet those regulatory requirements.

That said, I am well aware of the difficulties faced by a large number of communities throughout Scotland. I see John Swinney, poised like a coiled spring behind Christine Grahame, ready to leap to his feet. I hope that the member will understand that although I am putting pressure on Scottish Water, it is extraordinarily difficult to unwind fixed capital programmes; they are not easy to redirect. However, we are asking Scottish Water to take extremely seriously those development constraints where they occur throughout Scotland. I certainly recognise that it might not be possible to deal with the matter as quickly as one might wish.

It is important that everyone engages fully with the current consultation. I do not want the consequence of the current consultation to be a repetition of what is happening now, which is a consequence of the failures of the last consultation.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): The minister knows that I have been working closely with the registered social landlords in the Borders, who have informed me that although there is no development constraint in Peebles, the work there requires network modelling, which is dependent on the proposals from the RSL in Peebles. However, there are

certainly issues with Walkerburn, Fountainhall, Earlstoun and Ashkirk in my constituency, and the RSLs are looking for a confirmed and logical development programme. As the minister will be making the funding available, will he, with an eye to what he has just said about the next development round, be open to applications from providers other than Scottish Water Solutions Ltd—for example private companies or local authority direct labour organisations—to do the work under Scottish Water's direction?

Ross Finnie: That will be an operational matter for Scottish Water, but let me be clear that the principal reason why Scottish Water entered into its arrangements with Scottish Water Solutions was that it discovered that it was seriously short of the expertise required to manage a programme of £1.8 billion and undertake a major building programme—I think that members might feel some sympathy with that predicament. Therefore, Scottish Water brought in a degree of expertise, but the fact that it is operating in conjunction with Scottish Water Solutions does not, and was never intended to, preclude the award of contracts to bodies other than Scottish Water Solutions, and Scottish Water made that clear. Other outside bodies, such as those Mr Purvis referred to, will certainly be able to participate in that process.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): In my constituency, there is a significant development of affordable housing in Buchlyvie, but it appears that, rather late in the day, Scottish Water is asking for an additional £100,000 for extra work that is needed to the water and sewerage infrastructure. I am having great difficulty getting Scottish Water to come back to me and to move the situation forward. At the same time, Rural Stirling Housing Association Ltd will, I believe, lose Communities Scotland money. Will the minister help me to make progress?

Ross Finnie: I am disappointed that Dr Jackson has not had a timeous response from Scottish Water and will be glad to take that up. That is not acceptable. Anybody who deals with the public should respond timeously.

Landslides (Monitoring)

4. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to monitor the risk of, and prevent further, landslides. (S2O-3344)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): I confirm that, following the recent landslides on the A85 and A9, the Minister for Transport acted swiftly to commission a study to identify areas of greatest potential risk on the trunk road network and to recommend mitigation measures.

George Lyon: The minister will be aware that, in my constituency, the A83 was closed for three days because of landslides at the Rest and be Thankful and at Cairndow, which caused significant damage to the rural economy of Argyll and Bute. Will he persuade the Minister for Transport to take action in regard to the landslides on the A83 as well as those on the A85 and the A9?

Ross Finnie: I confirm that the studies are intended to be comprehensive and that we are not focusing solely on the two areas where the particular problems arose in the recent heavy flooding, although we must examine them. The two studies will report back to the Minister for Transport and will give us a much better feel for the potential danger and the actions that need to be taken, not only on the A85 and A9, but on the road to which George Lyon refers.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I welcome the initiative that the Minister for Transport has taken after his visit to my constituency, where there was a significant landslide on the A9. That was the second time in two years in which there was a major disruption to the transport routes to the north as a result of landslides following severe weather. Will the minister consider ensuring that the study that is being undertaken examines issues such as change of land use and other planning factors, particularly within agriculture and forestry, that might have an impact on the substantial land areas that adjoin some of the major trunk routes in Scotland to guarantee that thought and planning goes into any change of use that might have an impact on the stability of such land?

Ross Finnie: I assure the member that the current study—the first of the two studies—will conduct a detailed review of the construct and of adjacent land, to consider whether, as he suggests, ramifications that arise from changes in land use might have affected the run-off and given rise to the conditions.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To be fair to the Executive, following the recent disruption to the A85 and the A9, BEAR Scotland moved swiftly to repair the damage. However, the same cannot be said for local roads in the same area, which are local authorities' responsibility. Some of those roads remain unrepaired. Perth and Kinross Council has told me that even with the Bellwin formula, it will still incur a bill of £250,000 to repair those roads. Will the Executive consider providing additional assistance to local authorities to fill that gap and to ensure that those roads are repaired more rapidly?

Ross Finnie: The Bellwin scheme deals with exceptional circumstances that arise from a particular problem. I am sure that my friend the

Minister for Finance and Public Services will confirm that each year's grant-aided expenditure settlement to a local authority provides for local road building and maintenance. It is for local authorities to decide their priorities within that allocation of expenditure.

Environmental Improvements (Urban Areas)

5. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to improve the environment in urban areas. (S2O-3361)

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): We are committed to improving the environment in urban areas. A wide range of measures is in place to achieve our goal of building stronger communities. For example, we are working with local authorities and the Greenspace trusts to improve living spaces and provide access to recreation. In planning, the partnership agreement commits us to setting minimum standards for open space in new developments.

A range of initiatives that is funded by our new £104 million community regeneration fund will contribute to improving the environment in the most deprived 15 per cent of areas as identified in the Scottish index of deprivation.

We are working to improve the quality of urban rivers and are providing £230 million to local authorities in the current settlement through the strategic waste fund. We have set air quality objectives for local authorities in the air quality strategy.

The Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 provides additional powers to tackle antisocial environmental behaviour, such as writing graffiti and littering. It also supports local authorities in dealing with noise nuisance.

Robert Brown: In Glasgow, a key aspect of the environment—which the minister touched on—is the quality of the air that we breathe. Is he aware that some areas of Glasgow, such as the city centre and Byres Road areas, have concentrations of nitrogen dioxide that are well above the standards that are set out in the Executive's air quality strategy? In the Byres Road area, the figure has doubled over three years. That is linked to a worsening of respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis. Does he know that Glasgow's air quality plan is predicted to reduce NO₂ emissions by 20 per cent at best, as opposed to the 70 per cent that is required to meet the standards? How does the Scottish Executive intend to ensure that the air quality standards are met?

Ross Finnie: I am aware of some of the problems to which the member refers, which

include nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide. We are supporting local authorities, and Glasgow City Council in particular, through direct funding to deal with emission levels, and giving support to those by requiring the authorities to meet the minimum standards that are required by the MOT.

The Executive also provides grant support through the CleanUp and PowerShift initiatives towards the cost of cleaner technologies on a variety of emissions and types of re-engineering. Those grant schemes are available to local authorities.

I share Robert Brown's concern about the emissions levels in those parts of Glasgow. The programmes on which we are embarking are designed to improve levels, but I can but concede that more needs to be done. We will work in co-operation with all local authorities to improve the position.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The minister will be aware that Glasgow city centre is Scotland's biggest air quality management area because the source of pollution is road traffic. Given the Executive's projections that road traffic will increase dramatically in Glasgow, and its policy to accommodate that increase rather than reverse it, will the minister explain how air quality management areas will work to reduce air pollution in Glasgow? Is it not the case that improvements in technology will be insufficient to compensate for the increase in road traffic, and that air quality will therefore continue to deteriorate?

Ross Finnie: I do not accept the basic proposition that we are committed to accommodating and adopting the growth in transport; indeed, the policy is, in fact, to bring about a levelling off in the total increase in motor traffic.

As I said to Robert Brown, there are current schemes that try to deal with vehicle emissions. They might not be having sufficient effect, but we are working closely with Glasgow City Council. Therefore, I do not accept the member's proposition. It is clear that we have programmes in place and that they are intended to achieve the improvements to which he refers.

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): Does the minister acknowledge the importance of tackling CO₂ emissions in urban environments? What work is his department doing to ensure that the next review of building regulations by the Minister for Communities and the Deputy Minister for Communities will fully address improving energy efficiency by requiring the use of renewables technologies in all new Scottish buildings?

Ross Finnie: The member will be aware that the Executive has already taken action to improve building standards and we will continue to keep the matter under review. We have greatly improved the thermal quality of buildings through changes in those standards and that will achieve many of the improvements to which Sarah Boyack refers. Clearly, the minister will keep under review any improvements that can be achieved, although, as I said, we have already amended the building regulations in that regard.

Health and Community Care

Smoking in Public Places (Research)

1. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on research it has commissioned to investigate the impact of a ban on smoking in public places. (S2O-3300)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): We have commissioned an international review of the health and economic impact of the regulation of smoking in public places, which is being carried out by the health economic research unit at the University of Aberdeen. The work is on schedule and will be published before the end of this year.

Irene Oldfather: Will the minister give an assurance that any legislative action to ban smoking will be accompanied by a drive to provide support and assistance—including nicotine-replacement therapy—to those who do not want only to go outside a pub, but want to take the opportunity to give up smoking altogether?

Mr McCabe: I give an absolute assurance that, as the First Minister and I have stated, we are determined to take action to reduce the impact that tobacco has on our society in Scotland. When we launched our tobacco action plan earlier this year, we also announced an increase to £7 million in the amount of money that will be available by 2005-06 for smoking cessation services.

Today at Murrayfield stadium, I launched new smoking cessation guidelines for the professionals who will deliver the services. The guidelines will not only allow better delivery of service but allow us to learn exactly what works in different communities in order to try to achieve maximum impact. We specifically held the launch at Murrayfield stadium because the Scottish Rugby Union has announced that the stadium bowl at Murrayfield will now be smoke free. It is great news that such an important organisation in Scotland is not only prepared to go with the flow of public opinion, but is prepared to listen to its customers, take their views into account and say that smoking in the stadium bowl is no longer acceptable.

National Health Service (Reorganisation)

2. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with NHS boards regarding reorganisation of services. (S2O-3268)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The Scottish Executive Health Department and I maintain regular contact with NHS boards on a wide range of issues, including the reorganisation of services. For example, officials have had recent meetings with Argyll and Clyde NHS Board and Greater Glasgow NHS Board in relation to cross-boundary planning of services, and I met NHS Lothian last week in relation to service changes in West Lothian.

Dennis Canavan: Is the minister aware of the concern that existed in Forth valley for many years that there was too much dithering rather than decision making about the reorganisation of services? However, the current health board, after conducting a wide-ranging consultation process, has forwarded proposals to the Scottish Executive, including a proposal for the construction of a new state-of-the-art hospital at Larbert. Will the minister give us an absolute assurance that his statement to the Health Committee earlier this week will not lead to any postponement of the target date of 2009 for the opening of that new hospital, which the people of the Forth valley need at the earliest opportunity?

Malcolm Chisholm: I give Dennis Canavan that guarantee. It illustrates the general point that I made to the Health Committee that we want developments to progress as quickly as possible. Nothing that I have said will in any way delay the important decisions that have been made, whether those concern a new hospital in Forth valley or the Stobhill and Victoria hospitals in Glasgow. I commend the Forth Valley NHS Board for the way in which it has planned the changes and for the way in which it has consulted the population.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank the minister for his comments on NHS Argyll and Clyde. I invite him to go one step further: will he insist that NHS Argyll and Clyde revise its clinical strategy to ensure that cross-boundary working—not just with Greater Glasgow NHS Board but with Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board—becomes a reality?

Malcolm Chisholm: As I indicated in my substantive answer, we have been in discussion not just with NHS Argyll and Clyde but with NHS Greater Glasgow in order that the boards take more account of that issue. We should acknowledge that they have taken some account of that, but we realise that more needs to be done. We have been discussing the matter with the

boards. It is being explored and it will continue to be explored over the next few weeks.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): In relation to the possible downgrading of the consultant-led maternity service in Wick, to which I am bitterly opposed, the minister confirmed earlier this week that he would more or less shelve any proposals for the time being, unless the issue of clinical safety came up. Does the minister agree that medic-orientated clinical safety is not good enough, and that we have to consider safety in its widest sense, which includes the danger of pregnant mums getting caught in a snowdrift in Caithness, which could possibly lead to loss of life?

Malcolm Chisholm: As I said to Jamie Stone at this week's meeting of the Health Committee, a broad view has to be taken in relation to clinical safety. We have to have an exemption over the winter. We cannot stop changes that are genuinely about clinical safety. However, as I said at the committee, we will consider the matter very carefully, and we will not just accept the word of health boards.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): What discussions has the minister held recently with health boards with regard to the reorganisation of out-of-hours medical services?

Malcolm Chisholm: I have discussed out-of-hours services on several occasions in the course of discussions with health boards. Formally, out-of-hours services do not come into the centre for my approval, but that does not mean that I do not take a great interest in what is happening in various parts of Scotland in that regard. A big national effort is being made around out-of-hours changes, and there is major national support for that. All the plans are considered in a national context, and we now have national standards, which were developed by NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, and which all boards in Scotland must meet.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Does the Minister for Health and Community Care believe that, as a consequence of the reorganisation of health services, which has been going on in Tayside for a number of years, and which is now happening in the rest of the country, the Scottish Ambulance Service has sufficient resources to cope with the increased number of patient journeys that are taking place? What mechanisms does the minister have in place to guarantee that he can monitor the increase in demand on the Ambulance Service and the consequent increase of resources that is required to ensure that the public are given the support that they require?

Malcolm Chisholm: As the First Minister said a couple of hours ago, major additional resources have been allocated to the Scottish Ambulance Service. As I indicated at a previous question time, I take a close interest in how that is working out on the ground. I wrote recently to the chair of the Scottish Ambulance Service in relation to single crewed ambulances and the need to ensure that their use is diminished, and that they are used only in emergencies. I am keeping a careful eye on the operational aspects of the Ambulance Service as well as on its financial aspects.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I welcome the minister's emphasis on clinical safety. On the centralisation of consultant-led maternity services in the Argyll and Clyde NHS Board area, will the minister, in his discussions with the board, ask its members whether the number of women from Inverclyde giving birth to still-born babies is increasing or decreasing and whether the number of Inverclyde women giving birth by Caesarean section is increasing or decreasing?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will write to the Health Committee about the effect of the changes, as I have already undertaken to do. In general terms, we have made it absolutely clear to health boards that they must monitor the effect of any changes. They will obviously wish to highlight improvements that have sprung from them, but they ought also to be aware of, and to point out, any problems that have been thrown up as a result.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I call Paul Martin. This will have to be the last supplementary question.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Does the minister have any plans to reform how health boards consult local communities, and to give communities the opportunity to appeal to a court of law if they feel that a public consultation exercise has been merely cosmetic, as has been the case on a number of occasions throughout the Greater Glasgow NHS Board area?

Malcolm Chisholm: Members will remember that we passed the National Health Service Reform (Scotland) Act 2004 before the summer recess. That act set up the Scottish Health Council, whose central role will be to examine how boards deal with public involvement, and it will be up to that body to tell me if a board has not consulted properly. That new body has been set up to do that, and other things relating to public involvement and patient-focused care. It will report to ministers if consultation has not been carried out properly, and ministers will then instruct boards to start again, if necessary, or to carry out further consultation.

Clinical Psychologists (Children and Adolescents)

3. Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it will take to increase the number of clinical psychologists working in child and adolescent mental health teams. (S2O-3346)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): The Scottish Executive continues to build capacity within NHS Scotland across all staff groups, including clinical psychologists. A child and adolescent mental health work force group, chaired by Dr Graham Bryce, will report to us in 2005.

The number of whole-time-equivalent clinical psychologists working with children, young people and their families rose by eight in 2001-02—the most recent year for which figures are available—and that represents a 16 per cent increase. There is also an information and statistics division report, written in conjunction with NHS Education for Scotland, on the supply of the psychology work force, which is due to be published by the end of September.

Ms Byrne: I am sure that the minister is aware that there are only 57 whole-time-equivalent clinical psychologists working in child and adolescent mental health teams in Scotland. Will he assure me that, in considering current gaps and future need, he will recognise the additional support needs of young people with mental health problems in our schools, and that he will ensure that there are sufficient resources to meet the requirements of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004?

Mr McCabe: As I said, we are determined to build capacity in the NHS across all groups, and that includes mental health services for young people. I have mentioned the reports that we are awaiting. We will be guided by those reports, which will help us to direct the significant amounts of additional resource that are being channelled towards the national health service and allow us to direct resources in those areas. Of course we are determined to build capacity and to address the gaps that undoubtedly exist, but I think that the Scottish Executive can demonstrate, by its past actions and by its future intentions, that it is serious about addressing those gaps.

Primary Care (Missed Appointments)

4. Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to reduce the number of patients who do not attend their appointments in primary care. (S2O-3269)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): All patients have a responsibility to ensure that they keep their appointments and should make every reasonable effort to inform their practice or clinic if they are not able to do so.

The Executive has taken action to improve access to national health service primary care services. Offering patients a choice in how they access services, together with action to reduce waiting times, will help to reduce the number of missed appointments.

Margaret Jamieson: Is the minister aware that, in the 10 general practices in my constituency of Kilmarnock and Loudon, 1,112 DNAs—did not attends—were recorded in June this year and that, in my general practitioner's practice, which has direct access, 200 DNAs were recorded for the same period? Will he undertake to investigate the reasons why patients do not attend and will he require health boards to demonstrate that in field 4 of map 2 of the performance assessment framework, rather than concentrate on out-patient attendances?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am sure that Margaret Jamieson will agree that we need to concentrate both on out-patient appointment DNAs and on GP and nurse practice DNAs. I would certainly be keen to find out more about the reasons why patients do not attend, but I think that it should, in the interests of balance, be noted that the same United Kingdom survey from which Margaret Jamieson quoted—the “Developing Patient Partnerships” survey—actually showed a 46 per cent drop between last year and this year in the number of DNAs for appointments with GPs. Of course, that was only a survey, so we do not want to take too much comfort from it.

It is safe to say that the number of DNAs is dropping, but it must drop a lot more. The main reason why it has dropped is the significant advances that have been made on access to GPs, partly through the work of the primary care collaborative. That has meant that a large number of GP practices are using new methods to organise their appointments. We have a target of 48 hours to gain access to the appropriate member of a primary health care team, which is being met widely across Scotland.

NHS Greater Glasgow (Fluoridation)

5. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will respond to NHS Greater Glasgow's request to fluoridate the drinking water supply. (S2O-3386)

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Tom McCabe): Under current legislation, the decision to fluoridate public

drinking water supplies in Scotland is a matter for Scottish Water, on the basis of an application from a national health service board. No such application has been made by NHS Greater Glasgow.

Mark Ballard: In response to a written question from my colleague Eleanor Scott on the matter, Malcolm Chisholm said that there would be careful consideration of the views expressed during the consultation process on “Towards Better Oral Health in Children” and that there would be an announcement in response to that. When will the Executive make it clear whether it will support fluoridation? When will ministers acknowledge the huge opposition to mass involuntary medication? Such medication might be illegal, would meet huge public opposition and would ultimately be doomed to failure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Do not answer the question, Mr Ballard—just ask it.

Mr McCabe: The Executive is consulting the public on a number of strands of work relating both to children's oral health and to the provision of dentistry services in general. We intend to respond to those consultations in the near future. At that time, we will make our position perfectly clear.

The member raised the issue of the legality of fluoridation. I am sure that he was referring to the possible implications of such a measure in respect of the European convention on human rights. Those implications could be tested only against a specific legislative proposal or a proposition to fluoridate the water in a particular area of Scotland.

Child Health

6. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on legal advice on children's health recently obtained by the WWF that under international law a child has the right to clean and safe surroundings. (S2O-3387)

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): The conduct of negotiations in relation to international obligations is a matter for Westminster under the terms of the Scotland Act 1998. The Scottish Executive is fully involved in the development of the UK position in devolved areas.

Shiona Baird: Given the legal opinion to which I have referred and a report published in June by the World Health Organisation that highlighted the fact that children's health is often not considered in policy making and legislation, will the minister take responsibility for our children's health and tell us what action he will take to ensure that the UK Government takes the strongest possible position under the European Union's registration,

evaluation and authorisation of chemicals legislation in order to phase out hazardous man-made chemicals that violate a child's right to health?

Malcolm Chisholm: I make it absolutely clear that we strongly support children's entitlement to clean and safe surroundings. My answer to Shiona Baird's first question concerned the question of whether that is a right in international law, which is a matter for the Westminster Government. At the end of the day, the fundamental issue is not whether it is a right, but whether we will act on the basis that it is an entitlement. That is precisely what we will do.

We are actively engaged at UK level in taking forward the key international initiatives that relate to environment and health, which are the World Health Organisation's children's environmental health plan for Europe and the European environment and health strategy, which also has a child focus. The strategy is to be implemented in successive cycles. The first cycle aims to establish good understanding of the link between environmental factors and a range of illnesses, such as childhood respiratory diseases, asthma, childhood cancer and neuro-developmental disorders.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister envisage that his enthusiasm for ensuring that children are brought up in safe surroundings will lead to many more children being taken into care? If so, what provision will he make for that?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am not sure whether I totally follow Phil Gallie's thinking on that. Obviously, a safe environment in the wider sense includes the people who surround the child. There are many issues there. I can give the undertaking to Parliament that the Executive has certainly been taking increased and more vigorous action on child protection across its work and has been insisting that local agencies also work far more effectively together.

General

Affordable Housing Review

1. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what reliance the affordable housing review is placing on assessments of affordable housing need carried out by local authorities in their local housing strategies. (S2O-3380)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): The review has drawn on a number of sources, including the assessment of local authority housing strategies by Communities Scotland.

Eleanor Scott: Can the minister say when the information will be available in local housing strategies? Does she accept that not having such information could jeopardise decisions about the required level of investment in housing? Will she outline how the Executive will use the assessment of affordable housing need in the strategies to inform its affordable housing review?

Ms Curran: I am happy to provide Eleanor Scott with a range of details in writing. I reassure her that the information that is being gathered in local housing strategies will be used to inform our thinking in the review. We are, of course, using that information alongside the Bramley analysis that we have undertaken. We are using a range of sources of information to inform the review.

Eleanor Scott will appreciate that local housing strategies cover a range of matters. The strategies are now complete and Communities Scotland is in the process of assessing them all.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): How are the discussions going on development funding being moved into local authority departments and what progress is being made on those departments' co-ordination with housing associations to meet need?

Ms Curran: Linda Fabiani will be aware that the transfer of development funding has taken place in a number of local authorities. Given her knowledge of housing in Scotland, I am sure that she will also be aware that Communities Scotland is playing an active part in ensuring that commitments are honoured in that transfer, and that we are very much emphasising a strategic approach to housing delivery throughout Scotland so that—irrespective of who the provider is and who the landlord is—we have partnership between all the key interests to ensure that the focus is on delivery, efficiency and getting value for money.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the minister agree that affordable housing applies to house purchase as well as to house rental? What is being done to assist first-time buyers to purchase their first affordable home?

Ms Curran: Yes—I accept the point that Mary Scanlon makes. I am sure that she is aware that in our review of affordable housing, which is under way, we are also looking at low-cost home ownership options. Communities Scotland has considerable experience of the different methods that are used to provide such options. The £20 million that I announced recently will be used to consider a variety of models that would facilitate low-cost home ownership—first-time buyers would be part of that approach.

National Police Force

2. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is giving any

consideration to the creation of a national police force. (S2O-3271)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): There are no current plans to create a national police force.

Dennis Canavan: Does the minister accept that in any democracy the police should be accountable and responsive to the needs of local communities, which would be more difficult to achieve if there were one national police force for the whole of Scotland? Will the minister bear it in mind that some of the smaller forces, such as Central Scotland police force, have lower crime rates, higher detection rates and better community relations than some of the larger forces, such as the one that is headed by Paddy Tomkins, whose suggestion that there should be a national police force smacks of a police state rather than of a modern, accountable and decentralised democracy?

Cathy Jamieson: We can always rely on Dennis Canavan to liven things up. I refer the member to an answer that was given by the First Minister to a similar question last week. He made it clear that we reviewed the existing eight-force structure back in 2000 and concluded that there was not a case for moving at this point to a single force. However, we are reforming the structure of common police services and we are introducing efficiencies that will concentrate resources on front-line services, which is what communities want. They want police officers to be visible on the streets and they want them to be tackling problems such as antisocial behaviour and vandalism—examples of which are brought week on week to our MSP surgeries—in addition to tackling serious and organised crime.

For the record, I am sure that Dennis Canavan welcomes the fact that in June 2004 Central Scotland police had 765 police officers, compared with 715 in June 1999.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Strathclyde police have a good record on tackling crime and on detection rates. Does the minister agree that some services need to be delivered on a national basis? The most notable example is the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, which does an excellent job. A national police force, however, would not deliver a more efficient response to crime, but does the minister agree that we should, in relation to international and organised crime, continue to make it a priority that we work with other countries and the European Union to enable police forces to talk to other forces around the world and so ensure that we tackle such issues? Organised crime has no boundaries.

Cathy Jamieson: Pauline McNeill is correct. Serious crime and organised crime do not respect

boundaries, whether between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom or between the UK and the rest of the world. Along with the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General for Scotland, we take a close interest in events at European Union level and we are considering areas of mutual co-operation. We want to ensure that serious criminals who operate in any way in Scotland are brought to justice.

Solicitors (Conduct)

3. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to reform the system of regulating the conduct of solicitors. (S2O-3322)

The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry): We are developing policy on reform of the handling of complaints against solicitors, including complaints about their conduct. Our agenda builds on the recommendations that are contained in the previous session's Justice 1 Committee's report to Parliament, which was published on 27 November 2002. We will at the end of the year issue a public consultation paper on our firm proposals to improve the complaints handling system.

Mr Swinney: I welcome the minister's remarks and the response to the Justice 1 Committee's recommendations. Does the minister acknowledge that the Scottish legal services ombudsman's most recent annual report identified a rising number of instances in which the ombudsman recommended that the Law Society of Scotland reinvestigate complaints about the conduct of solicitors? Does not that highlight the significance and importance of the action that the minister has pledged to take? Will the minister give Parliament a commitment that there will be a speedy response to the consultation exercise?

Hugh Henry: As I said, there will be a consultation paper and we will respond to that consultation as quickly as we can. John Swinney is right to highlight issues that the ombudsman identified. Discussions have taken place between the Law Society of Scotland and the Minister for Justice; they are also keen for improvements to be made in the way complaints are handled. There is a general recognition that things could be done better and there is willingness on all sides to consider how that might be achieved. We must consider whether the best approach would be through self-regulation or through legislation, but whatever we do we are all pledged to ensuring that there is a more effective system for handling complaints in Scotland.

Road Safety (A90)

4. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what further action it plans to improve road safety at junctions

on the A90 trunk road between Dundee and Aberdeen. (S2O-3285)

The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen): The Scottish Executive constantly monitors accidents across the trunk road network and a number of improvements are currently under way or planned along the A90. Following the recent tragic accident at the A90 junction at Laurencekirk, I have asked for a full report and will consider appropriate safety measures as a matter of urgency.

Alex Johnstone: I have supported previous campaigns for improvements at junctions south of Dundee and in the Forfar area, to reduce the likelihood of accidents in future. When those improvements have been made through the provision of grade-separated junctions and the minister has received the reports that he has requested, will the minister consider making the junction with the A937 Montrose to Laurencekirk road his number 1 priority for further action?

Nicol Stephen: I am determined that there should be safety improvements at that junction. A site meeting took place on 10 September between Executive officials, the police and BEAR Scotland to consider all the options for safety improvements. I expect to receive the report following that meeting soon and I am determined to take action.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Does the minister agree that the long-term solution is a grade-separated junction and a flyover at Laurencekirk, which would prevent terrible deaths like those that have occurred? Short-term measures can also be taken. Will the minister consider reducing the speed limit to, for example, 50mph prior to implementation of a long-term solution?

Nicol Stephen: Yes I will—I want to consider a range of shorter-term safety measures. The long-term solution is the introduction of a grade-separated junction, but it will take time to do that. The situation is similar to the one at North Kessock where there are proposals for a grade-separated junction. Following a tragic accident there, I was determined to see short-term measures put in place there and there is now a speed restriction and vehicle-activated signs, so if a vehicle is travelling too fast, the driver immediately gets a warning sign. That appears to have been effective and such measures need to be considered for Laurencekirk, but we should not lose sight of the longer-term solution.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Regional Aid (Consultation)

6. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has

responded to the consultation by the Department for Trade and Industry on the future of regional aid that closed on 6 September 2004. (S2O-3266)

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): We have been in close contact with the DTI before, during and since its consultation on the future of regional aid. We worked with it on drafting the UK consultation document, we have encouraged Scottish stakeholders to respond and we fully support the UK view that the Commission's current proposals would not deliver better targeting of aid for the least favoured regions.

Helen Eadie: Is the minister aware that regional state aid will reduce from 64 per cent to 0 per cent, thereby seriously affecting the ability of the business support partnership in Fife to continue to provide much-needed business support? Will the minister note that Fife continues to have some of the highest levels of unemployment in east-central Scotland? Will he agree to meet leading councillors, officials, me and other colleagues to consider what steps might be taken to address a potentially very serious issue for Fife?

Lewis Macdonald: I am very conscious of the implications for Fife and other areas and will be happy to consider invitations to meet in the usual way. Indeed, I will be in Mrs Eadie's constituency next week and will be happy to discuss those matters with her then.

It is worth saying that the implications are similar for the whole of Scotland. The potential for reducing coverage from 48 per cent of the Scottish population to 8 per cent is clearly something that we take very seriously and we will continue to make representations on that.

European Union Constitution

7. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the new EU constitution will benefit Scotland. (S2O-3357)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): The EU constitutional treaty will undoubtedly benefit Scotland. It gives us what we want, which is an effective Europe where we need it, but it will also give us flexibility and national choice when we want it. The UK achieved the reforms that we—through Scotland's presidency of the group of EU regions with legislative powers—have sought. Those include a stronger voice for nation states, a stronger voice for national Parliaments and an enhanced role for the regions with legislative powers.

Irene Oldfather: Does the minister agree that in the run-up to the ratification process, it will be important that we make available to the people of Scotland information about the benefits that the

constitution and the new treaty will bring so that they can make an informed choice on how to vote in the proposed referendum? Does the Executive intend to promote or participate in the EU's 1,000 debates for Europe campaign to ensure that citizens throughout the EU are fully engaged in the ratification process?

Mr Kerr: The Executive will in particular want to say how Scotland benefits from the proposed treaty and the issues that will arise from it. We are always happy to take on such debates. There is also a larger discussion to be had about the role of Europe in our lives in terms of security, consumer safety and many other issues to do with trade and economic growth in Scotland. Europe is good for Scotland, as is the new constitutional treaty. It will provide powers that we have never had and it will maintain our good solid relationship with the rest of Europe.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy)

9. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will publish the findings of the internal review conducted earlier this year by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration on Munchausen's syndrome by proxy. (S2O-3308)

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Euan Robson): The report of the review is being published by the SCRA next week.

Alex Fergusson: I am absolutely delighted to hear that, given that the Executive earlier seemed to feel that the findings would not be made public. I am delighted to hear that they will be and I hope that we will have an opportunity to debate fully the findings in Parliament.

Does the minister agree that there is a need to balance the views that are given by so-called expert witnesses in cases that involve children? There is an urgent need to review the situation, so that more balanced opinions can be brought to bear.

Euan Robson: Such matters are difficult. I would prefer to delay comment until the review is in the public domain, which will happen next week. The issues are sensitive and need to be handled with care which, as I am sure we will see next week, is what has happened in this particular case. As to having a debate, we will consider that in the light of responses to the review.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call question 10, in the name of Pauline McNeill. I see that she is not present.

Violent Crime

11. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action is being taken to address the issue of violent crime. (S2O-3353)

The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson): The Scottish Executive is fully committed to reducing crime and to making our communities safer, so we have put in place a range of measures to tackle violent crime. National targets to reduce violent crime have been set for Scottish police forces for 2004-06, which build on the significant progress that has been made by the police on the targets that were set in May 2001. We are also reviewing the law and enforcement in respect of knife crime.

In relation to public service workers, the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Bill will make it a specific offence to assault, obstruct or hinder emergency workers who are responding to emergency circumstances. A wider package of measures is also being developed in partnership with the Scottish Trades Union Congress to provide further protection to all public service workers.

Bill Butler: Could the minister elaborate on the package of measures that have been worked out with the STUC to protect workers at the front line?

Cathy Jamieson: It is important that we recognise that it is not appropriate that any worker in the course of their day-to-day activities suffers abuse or violence. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers has had a very effective campaign on that issue, which has been supported by many members of this Parliament. The STUC is closely involved in the work that is being done to ensure that we are aware of the particular circumstances that workers are involved in, for example in hospitals, where nurses and others have suffered assaults in the course of their duties. That work is in addition to the work that is being done by the emergency services. We will keep Parliament updated as that work progresses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 12 has been withdrawn.

Standards in Public Services

13. Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether philanthropy has a role in contributing to standards in public services. (S2O-3354)

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): Improving and maintaining standards in public services are key priorities for the Executive. We welcome all contributions, and recognise that the philanthropic deeds of individuals or organisations can make a vital

difference to the quality of life of people throughout Scotland.

Maureen Macmillan: Will the minister draw the attention of the Minister for Education and Young People to Inverness High School where, on a small scale, philanthropists are helping the pupils in a project called REAL—real education active lives? As well as looking for large-scale philanthropists to help us in our public services, particularly in education, perhaps we could look at the small scale.

Mr Kerr: Absolutely. There are philanthropists out there with lots of money who are willing to invest in and assist with all parts of Scottish public life. We are also working with small businesses in communities so that they can contribute to the fabric of schools. That is not only about resources, but about people and their involvement in our schools. That critical exchange, which can take place in the wider community of a school, is central to the way we want our education system to develop. As an Executive, we want to support that activity through futurebuilders Scotland, through our volunteer strategy and through all the other work that we do to encourage organisations and to provide support for how they train and how they enhance their roles within the community. That is part of the bigger picture that we have for education and beyond, which is about involving people in our schools, which we all welcome.

Casinos (Planning)

14. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with planning authorities regarding the increase in the number of planning applications for large casinos. (S2O-3362)

The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran): I never envisaged that I would be answering question 14 today. Nonetheless, the Scottish Executive has had no discussions with planning authorities regarding proposals for large casinos.

Robert Brown: I must confess that I had not banked on our getting as far as question 14. Does the minister agree with Glasgow City Council's action to consider more closely the effects of the change in gambling laws and the number of planning applications that are being received in Glasgow for large casinos, and will the Executive carry out a similar exercise at national level? Does the minister further agree that the claimed benefits of the increase in the number of large casinos are extremely dubious, particularly those that relate to their effect on regeneration in cities?

Ms Curran: I am sympathetic to Glasgow City Council's approach of considering the large number of developments that the city could attract

in the casino sector and others. We would never rule out strategic consideration of the issues that Robert Brown raises, but we would need to ensure that the approach was consistent with other planning proposals and other approaches to planning in Scotland.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): The minister is probably unique in that, as well as planning responsibilities, she has responsibilities on financial inclusion. Will she take into account the implications of gambling in considering the broader planning and economic consequences of major casino developments in cities such as Glasgow and in West Dunbartonshire and other places where levels of deprivation are high?

Ms Curran: I was not going to thank Des McNulty for asking the question, but I will do so, given that the issue that he raises is significant and it is one that we must face in Scotland. It is inappropriate for people who are in financial need to be encouraged not to make the best use of their resources. As Des McNulty knows, the Executive has a strong commitment to financial inclusion. We recently committed an extra £2 million to developing financial inclusion services and the issue will continue to be a big priority in our work. I am sympathetic to Glasgow City Council's approach of questioning the consequences of such big developments, which can have a negative effect on some members of the community.

Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1640, in the name of Elaine Smith, on the general principles of the Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Bill.

15:03

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I refer to my registered interests that relate to the bill, which include assistance from Mike Dailly of the Govan Law Centre and funding from Unison.

I welcome the visitors who are in the public gallery, particularly the mums and babies who have come along. I thank everyone who has helped the bill to get to this stage, including the Health Committee, which recommended that the bill proceed to stage 2, its officials and the secondary committees that have been involved.

I am pleased that my first speech in the new Parliament building is on my own piece of legislation. I add to the many positive comments that have been made about the building by commending its accessibility. The bill promotes accessibility for families in all public places in Scotland. The idea for the bill arose after my members' business debate on breastfeeding in May 2001. It seemed to me that such an important health issue should not merely be mentioned once a year during breastfeeding awareness week, but deserved practical action by the Parliament. During that debate, I related the experiences of a mother who was put off a bus in Edinburgh for breastfeeding. In response, Malcolm Chisholm said:

"Ministers wrote to Lothian Regional Transport ... but under current laws we do not have powers to enforce anything on a bus company in that regard."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 2001; c 902.]

Three years later, the Parliament has the opportunity to change that situation.

If we enact the bill, in future no mum will have to suffer the stress and indignity of being harassed, segregated or ejected from a public place merely for wishing to give their child the best start in life.

The principal aims of the bill are to ensure that breast and bottle feeding mothers are given equal and unimpeded access to public services and spaces where children are entitled to be, and to encourage and make provision for the promotion of breastfeeding.

I have been asked many times whether women actually experience such ill treatment. The simple answer is yes, they do. In evidence to the Health

Committee, Rosemary Dodds of the National Childbirth Trust said:

"I deal with a slow but steady stream of concerned women who have been asked to leave premises."—[*Official Report*, Health Committee, 11 May 2004; c 853.]

Indeed, Kate Maclean MSP recalls being frogmarched out of the powder room of an Edinburgh department store for breastfeeding while, at the same time, a staff member ran off to get water for a customer's dog. Some of the many incidents that have been brought to my attention include a mother who was chastised over the tannoy in a Clydebank shopping mall, a woman being slow handclapped out of a Glasgow cafe and two women being asked to leave general practitioner and dental waiting rooms in Dumbarton and Ayrshire respectively.

Of even greater importance than those examples is the impact that they have on women's choices for feeding their babies. Figures released by the Department of Health last May showed that more than two thirds—67 per cent—of women believed that the general public find breastfeeding in public to be unacceptable. That clearly indicates that the 16 per cent of people who objected to the idea of women breastfeeding babies discreetly—which was the word that was used in the question—in public have a significantly disproportionate influence on women's perceptions. If we allow the barriers that make breastfeeding a largely hidden practice to remain unchallenged, future generations will be denied any positive reinforcement of breastfeeding as normal, everyday, maternal nurturing behaviour.

Scotland has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in Europe and one of the highest rates of ill health. Coatbridge has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in Scotland and—perhaps not coincidentally—has some of the highest rates of ill health in Scotland. It also has significant levels of deprivation. The correlation between areas of higher deprivation and poverty and low rates of breastfeeding is clear. Jenny Warren, the national breastfeeding adviser, makes the following observation:

"The mothers who have most to gain in terms of their own and their babies' health, namely the young, poor and least educated, are least likely to breastfeed ... They are more likely to be dependant on public transport and lack the confidence to breastfeed in public."

Given the importance of breastfeeding for the future health of our nation, it is vital that the Scottish Executive continues actively to promote breastfeeding. Section 4 of the Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Bill will help with that.

Other members will no doubt expand on the many proven health benefits of breastfeeding. Suffice it for me to say that the wealth of scientific research into the benefits of breastfeeding

suggests that there would be massive societal recompense in increasing the levels of breastfeeding. Indeed, research indicates that improvements in the levels of breastfeeding could save the national health service in Scotland an estimated £3.82 million a year through associated reduction in gastro-intestinal infections alone. That does not begin to take into account the savings associated with all the other health benefits to mother and child.

While the legislation would undoubtedly help to achieve those goals, it has been suggested that there might be alternative means, such as changing the civil law. However, that would put the onus on mothers to engage in civil action and would force them to endure the associated cost and stress involved. Another suggestion is to take the licensing route. However, the bill is not simply to do with improving access to restaurants, cafe and leisure facilities; it is primarily about ensuring that all breastfeeding mothers are given equal access to public services and are able to visit local authority offices, use public transport, attend doctors' appointments and so on. No one should be excluded from public areas because of the way in which they feed their baby and, as many of those areas are not subject to licensing laws, a change in that regard would have limited impact.

It is not envisaged that this legislation will result in many prosecutions. It is intended to act as a deterrent. Indeed, in evidence to the Health Committee, Deputy Chief Constable David Mellor, who was representing the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, said:

"My view is that it would be good law in that it would be symbolic, it would reinforce the aims of the bill and it would exist as a threat. Sometimes people need a threat so that they change their attitudes and behaviour. In support of the bill, I say simply ... that I anticipate that prosecutions would be few in number."—[*Official Report, Health Committee*, 11 May 2004; c 866.]

I hope that that gives comfort to anyone who might be putting their concern about fines before the need to protect vulnerable women and children.

In any case, the fines in the bill are based on the fines in current disability discrimination legislation and go up to a maximum of £2,500. The Scottish Human Rights Centre believes that

"this approach is a reasonable one to take"

and that it is likely to be

"considered, under ECHR, as a 'proportionate' measure".

The Conservatives' spokesperson Nanette Milne said recently:

"Owners of cafes, shops and restaurants should be free to decide for themselves whether to allow breastfeeding or not on their premises."

Surely she cannot be condoning the expulsion of breastfeeding babies and their mothers. The

example of the mother from Dumbarton who was told to stop breastfeeding in her general practitioner's waiting room while sitting under a sign that said "Breastfeeding mothers welcome here" shows that voluntary means have only limited success. In evidence to the Health Committee, Ellen Kelly from the City of Edinburgh Council said:

"After more than 25 years in local government, I can say that people do not do things unless they are compelled to do so, particularly in the field of equality. No advance in equality has been achieved without accompanying legislation".—[*Official Report, Health Committee*, 1 June 2004; c 928.]

The issue is not party political but has support across the political spectrum. Winston Churchill said:

"There is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies."

If we strengthen legislation, that will help us to meet our legal obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and various other human rights obligations and it will allow us to respond proactively to the World Health Organisation's call for Governments to adopt imaginative national policies and strategies to support breastfeeding.

A change in the law will not immediately effect the big shift in attitude that we need in Scotland, given our non-breastfeeding-friendly culture, but in time it will do just that. The Minister for Health and Community Care seems to agree. Malcolm Chisholm said in his evidence:

"the bill will certainly help to change cultural attitudes."—[*Official Report, Health Committee*, 1 June 2004; c 904.]

In the meantime, by legislating we will send a strong message that Scotland supports breastfeeding and will not tolerate the exclusion, segregation and harassment of mothers and babies that are legally permitted at present.

The legislation's primary aim is to protect and promote breastfeeding, but it protects all infant feeding of milk in public places. It is child centred and it is based on the protection of a child's right to eat while accessing vital public services. Health professionals throughout the country do commendable work and should be proud of their success in improving uptake and duration rates, but by the new year we are supposed to meet the challenge of 50 per cent of mums to be breastfeeding at six weeks, and as we stand now the figure is less than 40 per cent. The extent of the challenge in turning the tide towards breastfeeding in Scotland means that those health professionals undoubtedly need the Parliament's political support.

A mum, Shelley Joffre, highlighted the need for legislation when she said:

"The simple fact is, if you can't do it in public, then you face weeks of living under house arrest."

Breastfeeding should not have to be carried out in private as if it is something shameful. It should be supported, protected and celebrated in our society. The bill protects the right of hungry babies to eat—it is as simple as that. Today, the Parliament has the chance to take a practical step towards providing that protection and I urge all members to support the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Breastfeeding etc. (Scotland) Bill.

15:14

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): I am pleased to respond for the Executive today, as I did as deputy minister all those years ago in Elaine Smith's previous debate on the subject. This is a welcome opportunity to discuss a subject that the Executive has supported, promoted and resourced since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. I pay tribute to my predecessor Susan Deacon for all that she did in that regard. Perhaps we will hear from her in a moment.

We all want our children to be healthy and to grow up to be healthy adults, so we should do all that we can to ensure that children are well nourished from the minute that they are born. The bill will make it an offence to prevent or stop a child under the age of two years, who is permitted to be in a public or licensed premises, being fed milk in that place. It also seeks to impose on Scottish ministers a specific duty to support and encourage the breastfeeding of children by their mothers.

Elaine Smith's preparatory work in introducing the bill and the Health Committee's stage 1 deliberations have enabled us to explore some of the wider issues that affect a child's right, and a woman's ability and desire, to breastfeed. Although the bill centres on the child's right to be fed any form of milk in its formative years, it is fair to say that one of the bill's aims is to create a socially tolerant and safe environment in which a woman can breastfeed where and when it is most appropriate for her child, regardless of whether she is at home or in her local cafe. For that reason, I thank Elaine Smith for introducing the bill.

The reasons why the current Executive has supported breastfeeding throughout its time in power should be obvious, given that the health benefits of breastfeeding for both mother and baby are well accepted. The antibodies in breast milk protect against a wide range of infections and stimulate a baby's immature immune system.

Moreover, breastfeeding is known to provide the best nutrition for a baby, with advantages over formula feeding. As breastfed babies grow up, they have less chance of developing respiratory tract problems, gastroenteritis, ear infections, asthma, eczema, diabetes and obesity. Mothers who breastfeed are less likely to develop ovarian or breast cancer.

The Executive wants a Scotland in which all mothers who can and want to breastfeed do so and are given the information, support and encouragement that they need. To achieve that, we have implemented a wide programme of work that is delivered in four key ways. First, the national breastfeeding adviser, Jenny Warren, encourages, supports and audits national health service boards in developing breastfeeding strategies. Secondly, the Scottish breastfeeding group works across professional interests to share information on and to raise the profile of breastfeeding. It also takes forward pieces of work on breastfeeding. Thirdly, the breastfeeding website gives parents and practitioners news, statistics and information about good practice and research. Fourthly, the work of NHS Health Scotland includes the development of promotional materials and resources for parents, training materials for health professionals and support for evidence-based policy making through networking and research.

The good news in Scotland is that those strategies are producing positive results. Across NHS Scotland, most NHS boards are now implementing breastfeeding strategies. Of our maternity units, 11 have qualified for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund—UNICEF—UK baby-friendly initiative. The remainder are at various stages of working towards that award and 10 have received a certificate of commitment to acknowledge their progress in doing so. To put that in context, it means that 38 per cent of our maternity units are fully compliant with the baby-friendly initiative. As a result, 48 per cent of Scottish babies will be born in a unit that provides the highest level of available support for breastfeeding. By comparison, the equivalent figure for England is only 10 per cent and for Northern Ireland and Wales only 34 per cent. We should all be proud of that and encouraged by it.

Progress is also being made within our communities. For example, Anniesland, Bearsden and Milngavie local health care co-operative received Scotland's first UNICEF community award, which others are also working towards. Across the country, there are 150 breastfeeding support groups and a number of peer support initiatives and training strategies to ensure that health staff provide evidence-based and consistent advice and support to mothers.

Although there has been a steady upward trend in both the initiation and duration of breastfeeding in Scotland, the rates remain lower than we would like. In 1994, a national target was set with the aim that, by 2005, 50 per cent of mothers would still be breastfeeding their babies at six weeks of life. Our most recent data, for 2003, show a rate of 36.5 per cent, so we have some way to go to reach that target. I have asked officials in the Executive to develop a breastfeeding action plan to identify key areas for action for the next five years and to provide guidance on how the NHS can work with a range of key bodies and stakeholders to support delivery.

It is fair to say that, so far, work to promote breastfeeding has been largely concentrated within the health sector, but we appreciate that we need to involve other partners in early-years services if we are to give every child the best start in life. That is why breastfeeding will be a key, joint outcome measure in the Executive's integrated early-years strategy.

The stage 1 consideration of the bill flagged up concerns that the Health Committee was able to explore in depth. I myself had raised concerns on behalf of the Executive about the bill's enforceability. However, the Executive is content with the Health Committee's conclusions on enforcement and for the bill to proceed.

While the Health Committee accepted that there are likely to be few prosecutions under the bill once enacted, it also concluded that the legislation may have a deterrent effect. The act will set out clearly the circumstances in which it will be an offence to prevent or stop a child being fed milk and it may empower women to make key decisions about their feeding choices. The Health Committee accepted that legislation can assist a shift in attitude and behaviour and that the bill could thus support the uptake and duration of breastfeeding. Although there may not be universal acceptance of the bill, consultation has proven that there is an extremely high level of support for it both in organisations and among the public across Scotland, with many people greatly saddened that such a bill is needed in the first place.

The committee concluded that, although much of the evidence is anecdotal, adverse reaction to breastfeeding in public, or fear of such reaction, may impact negatively on the take-up and duration rates of breastfeeding. Regardless of the excellent promotional work by NHS Health Scotland and health boards across Scotland, there are still those who feel embarrassed or offended by breastfeeding. Those views are based, of course, on ignorance and prejudice and must be challenged. What many people do not appreciate is the physiological impact that asking a mother to

stop breastfeeding can have and the distress that that can cause. The debate and discussion around Elaine Smith's bill have done much to address that.

The bill could also mean that more women will choose to breastfeed in public. That itself would bolster the image of breastfeeding as a normal, natural and socially acceptable life event, which we hope would encourage even more mothers in the future. We do not want mothers to be put off breastfeeding by feeling that it could constrain them in where they can take their baby. Breastfeeding is, after all, the ultimate convenience food.

The bill places Scottish ministers under a specific duty to support and encourage the breastfeeding of children by their mothers. However, I should point out that the National Health Service Reform (Scotland) Act 2004 has already introduced a general duty on Scottish ministers, health boards, special health boards and the Common Services Agency to promote health improvement. The relevant provision will come into force on 1 January 2005.

As I have indicated, I am content with the conclusions that the Health Committee reached on the bill and for the bill to proceed, but very much in the context of our overall policy and strategies to promote the best possible start in life for the children of Scotland. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members of the public that it is not appropriate to applaud.

15:23

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I congratulate Elaine Smith and all who helped her to bring the bill to the Parliament. I know from personal experience the great deal of hard work that goes into a member's bill. Only members with great personal commitment will embark on the process in the first place. I also pay tribute to the fine speech that Elaine Smith made.

Anybody who has read the bill and monitored its progress through stage 1 will be aware that the bill's main thrust is to encourage a cultural change in Scotland with regard to views on breastfeeding. We in the Scottish National Party support that principle. The health benefits of breastfeeding are well known and I will discuss some of them later.

On a personal note, I feel that it is right to stress that I am not generally inclined to legislate in areas in which cultural change is needed. However, I believe that legislation is necessary in some cases and this is one such case. We must create a culture in which breastfeeding in public is accepted and, more important, regarded as the norm.

Elaine Smith referred earlier to Deputy Chief Constable David Mellor's evidence. However, given that he is the deputy chief constable of Fife, it would be remiss of me not to quote him. He said in evidence to the Health Committee:

"It is perfectly legitimate to create a criminal offence as part of a strategy to change attitudes. However, I sense that the creation of a criminal offence in this bill seems to be principally a symbolic act, although I accept that the existence on the statute book of an offence that means that people can threaten to use the criminal law is a convincing way of changing attitudes and behaviours."—[*Official Report, Health Committee*, 11 May 2004; c 866.]

It is my view that in doing that the bill will have a positive impact on breastfeeding rates in Scotland and there will be a subsequent improvement in the health of our children. However, such an improvement will not be possible if the bill exists in isolation. There must be greater a focus on narrowing the inequalities in breastfeeding rates that exist throughout Scotland. The bill must be supported through increased education and awareness campaigns that highlight the benefit of breastfeeding to both mother and child.

Elaine Smith: I am hopeful that the bill will be part of a multifaceted approach. Will the member join me in congratulating Rosehall High in Coatbridge, which is bringing in mothers from the community to work on educating first year pupils about, and highlighting the importance of, breastfeeding?

Tricia Marwick: I thank the member for that intervention. I have absolutely no hesitation in welcoming the initiative in Coatbridge and I hope that it will be followed in schools throughout Scotland.

I have no doubt that members are aware of the health benefits of breastfeeding to both children and mothers, but it never hurts to remind ourselves of some of the facts. Research has shown that breastfeeding can play a large role in reducing the number of childhood illnesses and in improving health in later life. A move to help our children get the best start in life must be welcomed. The World Health Organisation recommends, where possible, exclusive breastfeeding for infants up to the age of six months. Although Scotland might boast increasing levels of breastfeeding over the past 10 years, there is certainly no room for complacency.

An equally important point is that statistics show that rates in poorer areas are worse than those in affluent ones, which Elaine Smith touched on. In Shettleston in Glasgow, a mere 21 per cent of mothers breastfeed six months after their child is born. It is in tackling that inequality that the benefits of the bill can be seen most clearly, by creating a culture that encourages breastfeeding among all social classes. There is evidence to

suggest that prior exposure to breastfeeding or a positive role model in breastfeeding increases the likelihood of a new mother choosing to breastfeed her child. That evidence is true no matter which area or social class it is applied to.

Ending the negative attitudes towards breastfeeding and helping to create a culture across all sections of society where breastfeeding is the norm would be the bill's most important achievement. However, just as the bill respects the right to breastfeed, we need to ensure that those mothers who cannot breastfeed for whatever reason are not made to feel inadequate. Childbirth is a traumatic enough experience without new mothers feeling pressured into breastfeeding in the first place.

At present, funding for breastfeeding promotion and support is spread across various departments. Investment in the promotion of breastfeeding will save money in the longer term. Research has shown that there could be savings in the national health service of £3.5 million if breastfeeding rates increase—a fact that the Executive must take into account when deciding on funding in this area.

In conclusion, I am happy to support the general principles of the bill. I believe that it can play a vital role in making breastfeeding more acceptable in our society, but legislation alone cannot achieve that. The bill can achieve its aims only if it is supported by a coherent national breastfeeding strategy and education campaign. I welcome Malcolm Chisholm's remarks about a breastfeeding action plan, given that some health board areas do not have a strategy for breastfeeding. The action plan is long overdue and it will enhance the bill once it is enacted.

15:29

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I acknowledge Elaine Smith's commitment to this topic and the work that she has done, although that does not mean to say that we agree with everything in the bill.

I look at the subject from a slightly different angle; as I go through I will explain where I am coming from. The bill appears to be an attempt at socially engineering an attitudinal change in order to increase the practice of breastfeeding in Scotland. It promotes an ideal without providing the specifics of what antenatal professionals could or should do to encourage mothers to breastfeed and does not state that education authorities should get across during school years the message that breastfeeding is best. It makes no mention of midwives, health visitors or general practitioners encouraging mothers to extend the period for which they breastfeed. Surely, if children, who are the next generation of parents,

are not given the basic information on the benefits of breastfeeding, they will not be encouraged to take it up when they become parents and I ask why that was not included in the bill.

Elaine Smith: As Malcolm Chisholm has outlined, there is a lot of work going on in the Executive, and I have cited an example from a school in my constituency. The bill is part of a multifaceted approach; it is one way in which we hope that we can effect a change in cultural attitudes, which will help to increase breastfeeding rates.

Mr Davidson: The bill's only specific mention of the promotion of breastfeeding is in section 4, which states that ministers

"shall make arrangements ... for the purpose of supporting and encouraging the breastfeeding of children by their mothers."

However, that is qualified by the get-out-of-jail phrase,

"to such extent as they consider necessary to meet all reasonable requirements".

When I wrote that comment, I was not aware of Malcolm Chisholm's words, so he will be encouraged when I get to another part of the speech, which shows that he and I are coming from a similar position. Under current legislation, ministers already have a duty to take measures to improve health, so that role is already covered.

The Conservatives support the promotion of breastfeeding as best for baby and mother. Indeed, I was lucky that my five children were able to have the benefits of being breastfed by their mother, which she managed to do in all sorts of places around the world. Evidence exists that mothers who are able to breastfeed are less likely to develop certain types of cancer and postmenopausal hip fractures and that the baby is less likely to suffer from infections, allergies and childhood obesity, which can lead to early diabetes. That is of huge benefit in cost savings to the NHS, and children being healthier means less loss to the economy through parents taking time off work to look after ill children, which is not to mention the basic improvement in individual quality of life that the children will have over time.

We recognise the existence of a national breastfeeding adviser, a post that was set up by the Conservative Government in 1996 to work with health boards to provide tailor-made local solutions to develop and implement breastfeeding strategies. Thirteen of our 15 boards have a strategy, one has a policy and the other has a policy and guidelines. Evidence from various audit processes raised concerns about the target setting, the patchiness in peer support, the availability of funding, the implementation of the World Health Organisation's international code of

marketing of breast-milk substitutes and the sale of subsidised formula milk on NHS premises. In 1990, the Conservative Government signed the Innocenti declaration—the joint WHO-UNICEF piece of work that Malcolm Chisholm mentioned—which pledged to reinforce a breastfeeding culture within the health system, workplace and community.

Although breastfeeding rates are increasing, that is due to initiatives on the ground, not regulation. In 1994, the Scottish Office set a target of 50 per cent of mothers breastfeeding for at least six weeks. In 1990, 30 per cent of mothers did; in 1995, that rose to 36 per cent, as the minister mentioned; and in 2000, it was 40 per cent.

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Will David Davidson acknowledge the fact that, despite the excellent work of the national breastfeeding adviser—a post set up, as he rightly says, under a previous Conservative Administration—and all the excellent work that is being done in the health service and on the promotion of breastfeeding in a range of other settings, progress towards the target that the Conservative Government set has been much slower than any of us would want? If he is setting his face against the bill, perhaps he would like to tell us how we will accelerate progress towards the target that the Conservative Administration set.

Mr Davidson: On the progress over the past seven years, Susan Deacon must ask the ministers who preceded her in having control of the system and did not carry on working towards the target that was set. In fact, I am encouraged by what the minister said today and if he is playing catch up, I will help him if I can. I cannot breastfeed, unfortunately, but I can influence people.

None of what was achieved in the period up to 2000 was the result of introducing what I see as a legal cosh that is aimed at business owners and employers. The measure has nothing to do with promotion. It is not for business owners and employers to suggest to young mothers that they should breastfeed.

In Elaine Smith's pre-legislative consultation, evidence was received that 92 per cent of the public think that it is acceptable to breastfeed discreetly in public. The Health Committee heard evidence that many women do not wish to breastfeed in public but would rather have access to quiet and clean facilities—not toilet areas—but Elaine Smith told the committee that she did not wish to add that burden to businesses.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): Will the member be explicit about whether he defends the right of a cafe, restaurant or shop owner to ask a woman to leave because she is breastfeeding her baby?

Mr Davidson: I will answer that point when I come on to it in my speech.

There is no evidence that legislation such as the bill helps to encourage breastfeeding. In places where similar legislation is in place, such as many states of America, the breastfeeding rate has not improved and no cases have been identified as being brought under the breastfeeding laws.

The evidence to the Health Committee from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland was that even if the bill became law, it would not be a priority for action and could lead to a negative attitude to breastfeeding. Procurators fiscal are already hard-pressed by current crime rates and would be unlikely to undertake prosecutions—the Scottish Consumer Council shares that view.

My answer to Carolyn Leckie is that the current law protects all citizens—including mothers and other adults who are taking care of children—from assault or being threatened. Police evidence suggests that forces would take action under common law as appropriate if an assault occurred or a threat was made. I also point out that no action has yet been taken under section 29 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

In this modern society, we need to support better public information and education, not the use of negative legislation that is unlikely to be enforced and which does not promote breastfeeding to those who are not attracted to it or are simply unable to contribute.

The Parliament has a duty to pass sensible and practical legislation—not nanny-state measures that are seen to be politically correct. In the Health Committee, I said that I could not support the introduction of the proposed criminal offence. I believe that Elaine Smith genuinely seeks to promote breastfeeding—a laudable aim that all Conservatives share—but I give notice that we shall not support her bill in its current form. The inclusion of foodstuffs other than breast milk, albeit for technical reasons, has clouded the issue and invoked a negative response from health professionals.

The bill is unnecessary. It would overlap with existing legislation and would be unlikely to be applied. It would not be the best way to promote breastfeeding as the norm and it would not help more babies to be breastfed.

15:37

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): First, I add my congratulations to Elaine Smith on introducing this small but important bill. She is using the Scottish Parliament's processes as they were designed to

be used. I cannot imagine the introduction of such a bill in pre-devolution Scotland.

I make it clear that no whip is being applied to the Liberal Democrats in the vote on the bill. It is a member's bill and it is appropriate that members can vote on it outwith normal party-political discipline—members all know how keen I am on that.

The bill would make it an offence to prevent or stop a child who is under two from being fed milk in a public place. It is essential to stress that in Scots law, a child who is under two is already allowed to be fed milk in a public place. That is not what the bill is about. As members have heard, the police confirmed in evidence to the Health Committee that people who feed milk to children in public have the same right as anyone else has not to be assaulted or threatened.

The bill proposes to tackle the offence that is caused by people who insist on treating this natural and normal activity as though it were offensive. We should encourage and support the breastfeeding of children by their mothers. All members of the Health Committee, barring David Davidson, felt that the evidence that we received showed clearly that legislation to promote breastfeeding was necessary and important.

David Davidson could not answer the question that Carolyn Leckie asked him in her intervention. He cannot seriously defend the actions of a cafe owner who demands that a breastfeeding mother should leave the premises.

Mr Davidson: If Mr Rumbles had been paying attention, he would know that I did answer the question. Current law exists that can be used in such cases if an application is made to the police. Therefore, an extra piece of legislation is not required to cover such incidents. Of course I do not agree with such behaviour.

Mike Rumbles: Explaining David Davidson's position to the general public is difficult—I hardly understand it myself. It is unfortunate that the committee's report could not be unanimous, but there you are.

The passing of legislation to promote attitudinal change has a strong track record. How many people are prosecuted each year for not wearing car seat belts? We all know that we should wear car seat belts for our own safety, but passing a law requiring everyone to wear seat belts and creating a criminal offence with penalties for not doing so was felt to be necessary. That legislation has been very successful in changing people's attitudes and leading to greater road safety.

The situation that we are discussing is similar. I hope that we do not have to charge anyone under the legislation, but it is necessary to have the

backing of the criminal law if we want to get the message across that insulting mothers by preventing them from breastfeeding their children in a public place is simply unacceptable.

I am sorry that we cannot all see the need for the legislation, and it is unfortunate, to say the least, that the Conservative party, for which David Davidson is speaking, seems to be stuck once again with attitudes that are more akin to those of the 19th century than those of the 21st century. That, of course, is a matter for the Conservative party, but I wish that it would at least recognise the offence that is given to many parents and that there is a need to take every opportunity to tackle the issue.

In conclusion, I sincerely congratulate Elaine Smith on introducing the bill and I urge colleagues from all parties—even Conservative members when they arrive for the vote this evening—to take a leap into the 21st century and support the bill.

15:42

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I congratulate Elaine Smith and her supporters on their hard work to get this member's bill to this point and am pleased to rise in support of the bill, which has secured support in the Health Committee. The responses to the consultation were sound and helped the Health Committee to explore many of the issues in depth. There is no doubt in my mind that the bill is long overdue. I have also been delighted to learn this afternoon from the Minister for Health and Community Care, Malcolm Chisholm, that there will be Scottish Executive support for the bill.

The bill will give a mother a right to feed her baby in a public place and it provides Scotland with the chance to lead the way in the United Kingdom. From the many conversations that I have had with Elaine Smith, I know that there is widespread interest in the proposed legislation. Other members have spoken convincingly about the very real benefits of breastfeeding for the health of mothers and babies. I congratulate everyone who is working hard to promote such benefits in respect of such an important health issue.

I know that Elaine Smith has travelled far and wide to speak at conferences on the issue and has given many radio interviews on it. For the benefit of anyone who is in any doubt that mothers and babies are currently denied the right in question, I would like to give one illustration of the sort of thing that happens.

I stress that the bill has two critically important features, one of which relates to the rights of mothers and babies or carers, while the other relates to promotion by the Government. I will deal

with the claim that there should be a right and will take up a point that David Davidson made. He said that the bill is really about changing attitudes. To me, the bill, in the form in which it was presented to the Health Committee, clearly stated that it will be about rights.

I will illustrate the need for a right to be established by sharing the details of a case that underlines how vital the bill is. The most recent mother to contact the Parliament told how she was informed by the proprietor of a Stirlingshire restaurant that such "practices" were "better done in private". I think that referring to "practices" is very offensive. The mother was compelled to leave the restaurant. In her e-mail, she said that the restaurant is commended by VisitScotland and that it is promoted as having no age restriction on child access. That begs the question whether we want tourists also to experience this unfortunate aspect of our culture. She tells us that her story appeared in the *Stirling Observer* earlier in the summer. The restaurant in question is the Conservatory at Ballachallan, near Callander, and it received a tourism award. The mother is a doctor, who clearly knows the value of breastfeeding as she has breastfed all three of her children.

As Mike Rumbles said, and as the mother said in her correspondence to the Parliament, that attitude belongs in the 19th century. It does not reflect the type of Scottish hospitality that we need and want to promote to visitors. I agree wholeheartedly with that doctor. She continued in her e-mail:

"Any mother or midwife will tell you that you need to be really committed to breast feed your baby for more than the first few days post partum, it is generally painful and uncomfortable and many women find feeding in public a stressful experience."

That is a sentiment that anyone who has breastfed their babies in public would agree with—I know that I experienced that feeling. She continued:

"To be confronted as I was by the proprietor was not only embarrassing to me and the other customers it is also unacceptable at every level."

She concluded:

"It has the potential to destroy a woman's confidence breastfeeding."

That is just one example, but it was replicated many times in the written evidence that came to the Health Committee. This is the point at which I diverge from the view of David Davidson. He said that the evidence that the Health Committee had received said that many mothers did not want to feed in public. In fact, the great majority of the written evidence indicated that many mothers wanted to have the right to feed in public. The witnesses who came along to the committee very much supported that view in their oral evidence.

I believe that there is a need for the Parliament to legislate to require the Scottish Executive to promote breastfeeding, because there might not always be an Executive in power that is so thoroughly committed to this aspect of our life. Safeguards need always to be built in to ensure that, irrespective of whether individuals change, the policy is rooted in our legislation. I ask all members to give this vital bill a fair wind and to help turn what is evidently a sorely needed change into legislation.

15:47

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Elaine Smith on bringing the bill before Parliament and on the work that she and others have undertaken for the bill to reach this point. As this is a stage 1 debate, we are being invited to support the general principles of the bill. Like the Liberals, the SNP has no whip on the matter—it is a free vote. I place on record my support for the general principles of the bill. I view the issue of breastfeeding not simply as one of promoting good health. It is also a matter of equality and choice. It is about the right of individuals to feed the children for whom they are responsible as they see best, without fear of being discriminated against, shamed or otherwise pressured into following a particular route.

We should recognise that, even in an ideal world, breastfeeding is neither possible nor desirable in some cases—in the unfortunate case where a mother has died, in the presence of certain medical conditions, where mothers do not wish to breastfeed for personal reasons, or where mothers have drug addictions. While we promote breastfeeding, we should ensure that those who cannot or do not wish to breastfeed are not subjected to the same culture of disapproval to which some mothers who choose to breastfeed are subjected at the moment.

Although it is generally understood that breastfeeding has many advantages, and although there has been some advance in the situation in recent years, the number of women choosing to breastfeed—and, significantly, those who choose to do so during the crucial first six months, as identified by the World Health Organisation—remains disappointingly low. The greatest barrier that many mothers face is social and cultural. There is wide variation across Scotland in the number of mothers who breastfeed at six to eight weeks. The figure is as low as 26 per cent in Lanarkshire but as high as 48 per cent in the Borders and Lothians.

There are some in this chamber who will argue that we cannot effect cultural change by legislation and that the state has no role in such matters. Although they are correct to say that legislative

change alone cannot change cultural attitudes, they are wrong in assuming that it has no role whatever. We need to promote a more positive attitude to breastfeeding, we need to encourage and support women who wish to breastfeed and we must challenge the culture of disdain that unfortunately exists in certain sections of our community, promoting instead a positive acceptance of breastfeeding. We must also continue to develop breastfeeding strategies, as advocated by the WHO.

We must do all of those things, but we must do more. Positive promotion of breastfeeding is all very well, but there is a political role too. We need to send out the right signals from this Parliament. I believe that, in this instance, legislation can be used to promote social change and that that social change is desirable. By supporting the bill today, the Parliament will be sending out the right message. That is why I have great pleasure in supporting Elaine Smith's bill this afternoon, and I hope that the Parliament does so too.

15:51

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I am happy to speak in support of Elaine Smith's bill. What I have to say will sound quite similar to what other members have said, because there is a lot of agreement and support, and I am glad about that. Before I begin, however, I want to pick up on something that David Davidson said about the use of existing laws to protect a woman who might be harassed by a proprietor while she is breastfeeding in a cafe. David Davidson may want to correct me, but it sounded to me as if she would almost have to be physically assaulted before she could invoke that law. That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about people being disapproved of in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable when they are carrying out a natural act and I do not think that existing laws necessarily cover that.

Breastfeeding is a human rights issue. I am not talking specifically about the rights of the mother to breastfeed, although I support those. I am talking about the right of a child to be fed where it needs feeding and its right to be fed on human milk. The benefits of breastfeeding are well known. Other members have run through the short-term benefits for the baby, which include less gastroenteritis and fewer respiratory infections and allergies. There are longer-term effects for the baby as it grows older, with less asthma, fewer ear infections and less diabetes and obesity. There are also benefits for the mother, with a more rapid return of the body to its pre-pregnancy state, greater ease in regaining one's figure and, in the long term, a lower instance of some cancers.

As I said, the benefits of breastfeeding are well known. Equally well known is Scotland's poor rate

of breastfeeding. Despite the initiatives to promote breastfeeding that were mentioned by the minister and which I fully support, I feel that out there on the ground, rather than at strategic decision-making level, we have a tendency not to be as strong as we might be in promoting breastfeeding, because we do not want to make mothers who choose to feed their babies artificially feel guilty. Of course, we should not do that, but I believe that we still hold back a bit on actively promoting breastfeeding. Given our poor rates, particularly in some parts of the country, that is a pity.

It is true that, in our society, mothers must have the choice as to how to feed their infants, but let us make that a real choice and not a decision that is influenced unduly by the prejudices of those few people—the 16 per cent that Elaine Smith mentioned—who seem to find a natural act odd. Helen Eadie mentioned that an unfortunate experience, such as those that we have heard that certain people have suffered while breastfeeding, can destroy a woman's confidence in breastfeeding. The fear of that happening could cause a woman never to start breastfeeding and the bill will remove that fear. For that reason alone, it is an excellent thing.

If breastfeeding is to be normalised—it is awful that we actually have to do that, but it is the reality—the bill will help to do it and our children will benefit. There is no doubt that we need to change attitudes in order to promote breastfeeding. The bill by itself will not do that, but it will prevent some of the obvious and unacceptable manifestations of negative attitudes to breastfeeding. It will send a powerful message about the rights of mothers and children in Scotland. The mothers in Scotland who are least likely to breastfeed are those for whom, paradoxically, breastfeeding is most important. Children of young disadvantaged mums are more likely to suffer from many of the common childhood infections that were mentioned at the beginning of the debate and that breastfeeding is known to reduce, but their mothers are most likely to be deterred from breastfeeding by negative attitudes. As well as a human rights issue, this is an issue of health inequality.

There are many things that must be done to support breastfeeding, including support from midwives and health visitors in the early stages. As other members have mentioned, breastfeeding is not always easy. Breastfeeding may be a natural act, but in many cases it is not one that can just happen without support to get it established. Other issues, such as maternity benefits and employment law, are outwith the scope of the Parliament, but the bill deals with an issue that is within our power. The bill is something that we can do to make it easier and

more pleasant for Scottish mothers to breastfeed their children.

I believe that the bill will help to improve our attitudes to and, eventually, our rates of breastfeeding in Scotland. I urge the Parliament to support it.

15:55

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank Elaine Smith for bringing the bill before the Parliament and I will speak in favour of its general principles. Through this debate and the discussions that have taken place in the Health Committee and elsewhere, Elaine Smith has already achieved a great deal in sending a positive message to Scotland about our support for breastfeeding.

It is interesting to note that, as far as I am aware, during the consultation process and the parliamentary discussion of the bill no one has questioned the clear benefits of breastfeeding. It is widely accepted that breast is best and that, for the health of both the mother and the child, we should do more to encourage breastfeeding. The disagreements start over the issue of breastfeeding in public, which is why I believe the bill is needed. There is no doubt that some people have a strongly held view that breastfeeding in public, however discreet—I believe that it is nearly always discreet—is unacceptable. Even more worrying is the fact that a considerable number of people are not hostile to but awkward, uncomfortable or uneasy about breastfeeding. That is a debilitating attitude, because its effect is to discourage young mothers from breastfeeding their children.

The embarrassment factor—the fact that breastfeeding in public is still unacceptable to some and is not that commonplace—stops mothers even considering breastfeeding their children. The bill is necessary because it tries to change that negative attitude. The legislation confirms that breastfeeding is an everyday activity that we should accept as normal, rather than eccentric, and it gives support and protection to those who are occasionally made to feel small, despite the fact that they want to do the best for their child.

I will say a few words from a personal perspective. I will not pretend that my experience is typical, but I hope that it illuminates some of the difficulties that we face in promoting and encouraging breastfeeding as the healthiest option for young children. Some members will know that I have three young children. In fact, my wife, Claire, is currently expecting and is due in five weeks. I am thinking of applying to the First Minister for support under the fresh talent initiative.

I like to think that I have always been aware of the benefits of breastfeeding, but I remember vividly how awkward and uncomfortable I was when I first encountered it in practice. That happened only three or four years before my first child was born. I was visiting a friend, Sallyanne, just after the birth of her child, and I remember feeling that I could not enter her front room, because her husband, Brian, told me that she was breastfeeding. Sallyanne told me not to be stupid, but I had to work hard to get over my embarrassment.

As members might expect, I am a little more comfortable with breastfeeding after having three breastfed children of my own. I do not want members to think that I have undergone some sort of aversion therapy. The point that I am trying to make is that, despite my rational understanding of and support for breastfeeding, there are strong cultural and societal attitudes that influence our behaviour and to which we often conform despite ourselves.

We do not need legislation to tackle male embarrassment or social awkwardness. If we needed bills to deal with every tic in the Scottish male psyche, we might have to meet constantly for months on end. However, some negative attitudes to breastfeeding spill over into something far more damaging: prejudice, hostility, discrimination and even segregation. I believe that the bill will address those problems.

Of course, when I became a dad and Claire was breastfeeding our babies, the boot was on the other foot. I do not know how many times she—like so many other mums—had to put up with dirty looks and tuts of disapproval when she found herself stuck in the wrong place at the wrong time with a hungry baby who did not understand what some, laughingly, call manners, or so-called polite behaviour. I remember at least two occasions when I was with her or met her and noticed that she had become a little quiet or subdued. When I asked what the matter was, she said that she had just been given a row by a total stranger. On both occasions she had been asked to sit in the toilet while feeding.

Claire did not let those incidents—unpleasant though they might have been—change the way that she chose to feed her baby, but we are kidding ourselves if we think that such attitudes are not a significant factor in putting off nearly half of all mothers from ever breastfeeding. The bill offers those mothers some protection. This is not about prosecuting individuals who feel strongly that breastfeeding in public is unacceptable, but it is about supporting those who want to do what is best for their child. It is about trying to establish in every young mother's mind the idea that, far from breaking a social taboo, they are doing what is right and, furthermore, what is normal.

Sadly, it is the case that the children who would most benefit from the best start in life and from the protection and help that we can offer are those who are most likely to miss out on the advantages of breastfeeding—a point made by Eleanor Scott a few minutes ago. Children born to families in areas of social deprivation are far more likely to be bottle fed than breastfed. Young mothers with little status, income or education are disadvantaged yet again by having the poorest access to safe public areas to breastfeed and not having the self-confidence to challenge public intolerance.

The evidence presented to the Health Committee was overwhelmingly in support of the bill. The submission from the Scottish NHS Confederation included a comment from a health worker, who said:

"It's acceptable to give a human baby animals' milk in a plastic bottle and yet what it ultimately should be having, human milk from a breast, needs a bill through parliament. What a strange country we live in!"

This Parliament, perhaps more than many other institutions, should recognise and understand the need to help our young people at the earliest stage in life to give them the best chances in life. I know that the Executive is committed to doing just that through many different programmes from nursery education and fresh fruit in schools to early intervention and books for babies. We are tackling child poverty and allowing all children the opportunity to develop to their full potential. Encouraging more women to breastfeed would be one of the strongest public health measures that we could introduce and it would improve the quality of life for millions of future Scots. It would improve our terrible dental health record and help to reduce obesity. It would reduce the risk of some cancers and it would tackle a whole list of chronic and acute diseases. What is more, breastfeeding is environmentally friendly and sustainable, it is accessible to nearly all and it is free. The bill marks a major step in the right direction: let us take it.

16:02

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I congratulate Elaine Smith on getting this far and on achieving the support of the Executive. I look forward to the bill becoming law.

I start by addressing some of the remarks made by David Davidson. I have to say that to refer to health promotion and the benefits of breastfeeding, and to claim to be an advocate of breastfeeding and to support the achievement of a higher uptake of breastfeeding, but then to suggest that the bill will not assist in achieving those aims displays a degree of ignorance. He fails to take account of the effect that disapproval—even if it is only a dirty look—has on

the physiological process of breastfeeding. The let-down reflex sometimes does not happen if a woman feels sufficiently uncomfortable or embarrassed. David Davidson really ought to reconsider. Perhaps for the first time I am genuinely trying to dissuade him from his view.

David Davidson ignored the main reason why women might be reluctant to feed in public when he referred to women being unable to contribute—whatever that meant. He ignores the fact that women might be reluctant to feed in public because those very attitudes exist in the first place. He uses the fact that some women who presented evidence to the Health Committee said that they would prefer to feed in private, but ignores the fact that that only reflects the prejudices that exist in society because we have done nothing to tackle them. Perhaps he might reconsider his position.

Mr Davidson: During the progress of the bill through the Health Committee, I was surprised that there was no attempt to use legislation to provide facilities for people—I mean decent facilities, not toilets and back rooms. It seems that we are coming at the issue from a different angle. We cannot encourage change just by legislating; we must start with the bottom of society, by which I mean young people from the knee—indeed, from the breast.

Carolyn Leckie: With due respect, the member's point is another massive red herring.

The member said that the Tories appointed the national breastfeeding adviser. However, under the Tories, breastfeeding nurses who specialised in supporting women in maternity hospitals went out the door when staffing levels were reduced, so we are witnessing a wee bit of hypocrisy.

As Elaine Smith said, the bill represents just one approach. The Tories have not explained how their opposition to the bill will help to achieve the outcomes that they talk about. No one disagrees with the Tories when they say that they would like there to be more resources—which I take it the Tories would fund through direct taxation—to promote breastfeeding, employ more midwives and health visitors and give midwives more time to help the poorest and most vulnerable women to start breastfeeding. I am glad that David Davidson expressed support for such measures and I will remember that he did so when we are demanding more midwives, health visitors and resources to promote breastfeeding.

Just as David Davidson raised concerns, I have some concerns that the bill will not go far enough. I whole-heartedly support the bill, but other measures should be taken, too. Ken Macintosh's anecdote reminded me of my first militant breastfeed, which took place within 36 hours of the

birth of my daughter. I had to confront the attitudes of my father-in-law—now my ex-father-in-law, thankfully. I was not in a restaurant, a cafe or another public place; I was in my bed, in the maternity hospital. I had to confront my father-in-law's discomfort, embarrassment and tut-tutting at that stage, which demonstrates that there is a disproportionate need for a shift in attitudes among men. Dare I say that David Davidson might be one of those men?

I hope that Elaine Smith will consider supporting an amendment that I intend to lodge about the age limit in the bill. I breastfed both my daughters, who are now teenagers, thankfully—I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I breastfed my first daughter until she was two years and two months old. I am sure that all members support the principles of baby-led feeding. We are trying to get the message across that breastfeeding cannot be artificially halted; it is a dynamic process between mother and child and no one has the right to interfere with it. I am concerned that the bill will set an arbitrary time limit, especially when we consider a conscious child at two years, who knows the words “breast” and “milk” and can make vocal demands. I am concerned that the bill will create a situation in which the day before a child's second birthday, nobody would be able to interfere with her right to request a breastfeed, but a day later, people could interfere.

Elaine Smith: An age limit was included because it was thought that there should be a legal definition of the word “child”. I am sure that we can consider that at stage 2. We decided on a limit of two years—rather than one, three or four years—because WHO advice is to breastfeed for “up to two years and beyond”.

Of course, although it would not be illegal to prevent a child over two from being breastfed in public, the status quo would prevail. Once a cultural shift has taken place, I think that we will find that all breastfeeding is much more accepted in society.

Carolyn Leckie: I hope that we will be able to find a form of words in an amendment that achieves a wee bit of a compromise. That would be helpful.

As members are talking about changing attitudes through legislation, we should consider our own back yard. Yesterday we debated the Fraser inquiry report. I do not think that Enric Miralles had breastfeeding mothers in mind when he conceived his vision. We do not have a crèche for MSPs or staff and, to my knowledge, we do not have facilities to enable women who return to work to express or store milk on the premises. We have to look closer to home.

Unfortunately, that situation reflects the situation in many workplaces. We do not have sufficient maternity leave. Mothers do not have the right to time off to express milk or to the facilities to store expressed breast milk, and they do not have the right to leave work to go and feed their child when they have returned to work. All those things have to be tackled if we are to increase the rate of breastfeeding.

Even in maternity hospitals, midwives who return to work find it difficult to express and store milk and to get the time off to ensure that their child continues to be breastfed while they are supporting new mothers and helping them to establish breastfeeding. There is also an issue with staffing levels in maternity hospitals. In my experience, I often had to leave a distraught woman who was having difficulty establishing breastfeeding because I had to deal with an emergency somewhere else because there was no one else to deal with it. Midwives should not be forced to make those choices when they are attempting to deliver equal care. Women should not be left bereft and distraught without the support that could be available if the appropriate resources were devoted.

I make those comments to the Executive. There is lots to be done, specifically for the poorest and most vulnerable women, only 22 per cent of whom are breastfeeding at six weeks. We need to tackle the nutritional health of those children.

To finish, I refer back to David Davidson's remarks about not doing anything about the promotion of formula milk. I absolutely agree with him and cannot believe that he shares my condemnation of companies such as Nestlé that promote the use of milk that leads to the death of children in the developing world and which put profits ahead of children's health. I am glad that David Davidson agrees that that is inappropriate and I look forward to hearing the Tories' proposals for tackling corporations such as Nestlé and preventing them from stalking the poorest children in our world.

I congratulate Elaine Smith again. We will support the bill, and I look forward to stage 2 when I hope that we can address some of our concerns. I am glad that she has brought this issue before the Parliament.

16:13

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Like everyone else in the chamber—apart from David Davidson, possibly—I welcome this member's bill, and I commend Elaine Smith for her hard work. I also commend the organisations and individuals who have supported her and helped her to get it to this stage.

Of course, the bill will not by itself change Scotland's record on breastfeeding, but it will give strong support to breastfeeding mothers. Like other equalities legislation, it will send a strong signal to our society that babies have a right to be fed when and where they are hungry. I welcome what Malcolm Chisholm said about the Executive's support for breastfeeding mothers. I will not rehearse the health, emotional and psychological benefits that breastfeeding brings to mothers and children, because I realise that everyone in the chamber is aware of them.

Our country's reluctance to accept breastfeeding is not a new phenomenon; it has been growing for the past 60 years or so, so we have two or three generations of entrenched attitudes to overcome. When John Farquhar Munro was in the chamber earlier, I was going to suggest to him that the timescale paralleled the decline in Gaelic and I wondered whether there was any link. However, he is not here to be teased so what is the point?

Perversely enough, the establishment of the welfare state began the shift away from breastfeeding, with the availability of orange juice, which was good, cod liver oil, which was good, and national dried milk, which was not so good. I was lucky, because my mother breastfed me, and she was supported by my auntie, who was a midwife. In our family, babies were breastfed.

By the time that I had my four children in the mid-1960s to early 1970s, breastfeeding was almost a thing of the past. My children were born in rural hospitals, not urban hospitals, and each time I was one of only a couple of mothers in the ward who were breastfeeding their babies. There was tremendous pressure then to bottle feed. Unless mothers really insisted that they would get up in the middle of the night, the nurses would very kindly bottle feed their babies for them, believing that mothers would prefer to have a good night's sleep. When women left hospital, they went away laden with packets of Cow & Gate and SMA and every kind of baby food. Mothers were given the impression that those were the best things to use.

I will tell members a story at which I hope they will not faint. When I went to my general practitioner for my post-natal check-up after my first child was born, I asked how I would know if my baby was getting enough milk. He said, "Oh, just get a red hot needle and enlarge the teat." I said, "Pardon?" and he said, "Are you breastfeeding?" It was assumed that everybody bottle fed. I felt like some kind of weird person, because all the other women I knew would remark about it and say things like, "I thought it was only people with really large boobs who could breastfeed." I thought, "Well, no, I'm not too bad."

I was interested in recent surveys on attitudes to breastfeeding, which show that attitudes have not changed in 40 years. I did my own surveys back then, and asked mothers why they preferred bottle feeding. The answers then were similar to those now. First, it is perceived to be difficult to breastfeed. Sometimes it is difficult to establish it, but once someone is breastfeeding it is much easier than faffing about sterilising bottles and so on. There is the business about not knowing how much a baby has had, but it can be seen if the baby is thriving, although support from district nurses and health visitors is required.

Another issue, which Ken Macintosh touched on, is the attitude of partners and husbands. Unless women have the support of their male partner, they are unlikely to breastfeed. Sometimes, husbands thought that breastfeeding was dirty and they did not fancy what might happen, which made women uncomfortable with their own bodies. They talked about wanting their figure back and it not being very nice. There was an embarrassment factor. I do not blame women for that, because they are victims of our society. They do not have the attitude towards their bodies that allows them to breastfeed comfortably.

That attitude was illustrated in a recent poster campaign advertising the enlargement of the European Union. The poster showed a mother breastfeeding her baby, but for Britain the nipple had to be airbrushed out. That shows that our society is at once prudish and sex-mad. We have to examine our attitudes. I do not blame mothers, because they are responding to society's attitudes, which have resulted in women being asked to leave buses, restaurants and shops. I have seen a nursing mother who was trying to feed her child on a train from Inverness to Edinburgh in tears, because she was being stared at disapprovingly by other passengers.

The bill will give babies rights—the right to be fed without harassment wherever they are. That means not in toilets or shitty, smelly nappy-changing rooms, as my daughter describes them, but where they and their mothers feel comfortable. Nursing mothers do not want to flaunt themselves or make exhibitions of themselves, but they do not want to be treated as freaks. They are doing the most natural thing in the world.

My daughter has just had her third baby and I am proud to say that she is breastfeeding him, as she did her other two babies. When I told her about the bill she was ecstatic, until she discovered that it would not apply in London, where she lives. She wants to know, "Why can't we have it here, too?" In Scotland we are leading the way. I hope that, in time, the bill will change attitudes and help to give breastfeeding mothers the support that they need. Breastfeeding is a

natural function that should be celebrated and supported for the health of our children and the health of our mothers.

16:20

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I am delighted to speak in support of the bill. I commend Elaine Smith for the work that she has done in getting the bill before the Parliament today.

There has been criticism of the bill on a variety of fronts, from accusations of a nanny state—which is perhaps an unusually apt expression in this instance—to claims that it will interfere with business, to assertions that the issue is somehow too trivial for parliamentary action. I refute all those criticisms. It is entirely appropriate for Parliament to take action on the matter. We are not the first Parliament to legislate on this important issue. The considerable health benefits of breastfeeding to mother and child are well proven and significant. We should tackle anything that acts as a barrier to mothers choosing to breastfeed their babies. A baby has a right to be fed when it is hungry; therefore, it is important to establish the right of babies to be fed in public places where children are permitted to be, otherwise breastfeeding mothers will, in effect, be forced to stay at home.

Embarrassment and the apparent unacceptability of breastfeeding in public have been found to be key factors that influence choices in infant feeding and whether mothers breastfeed. According to UNICEF, nine out of 10 women who breastfeed give up breastfeeding before they want to do so. For a quarter of those women, the reason is that they are returning to work, and I presume that they feel that breastfeeding in or near the workplace is difficult or impossible. The introduction of legislation to ensure that babies can enjoy the best possible start in life without their mothers being housebound or banished to the less than savoury environs of the public toilet may seem like overkill, but sadly it has proved to be necessary. I cannot decide whether it is appalling or stupid that many mothers are put off the natural, healthy option because of the reaction of people such as shop and restaurant owners and managers to the perceived public disapproval of breastfeeding. I am saddened that mothers occasionally encounter public disapproval.

The bill will raise awareness of the importance of breastfeeding and encourage mothers to make the natural, healthy choice when it is possible for them to do so. Breastfeeding is not possible for every mother and, for a variety of reasons, some will choose not to breastfeed, but that should be for good and sufficient reasons, not because of actual or perceived public prejudice and ignorance. Breastfeeding can be done discreetly and need

embarrass no one—I sincerely hope that there will be a great deal more of it about soon.

16:23

Mike Rumbles: It is unusual for two Liberal Democrats to speak after each other.

There has not been a huge turnout of members for the debate, not because the bill lacks importance, but because it has a large measure of support from across the political spectrum, apart from the Conservatives. I do not understand why the members of the Conservative party have been largely absent from the debate, given that they oppose the bill. It is one thing for members who are content with the proposed legislation not to attend the debate, but it surprises me that the seats of the party that opposes the bill are largely empty.

The bill is not about so-called political correctness, nor is it about the nanny state, as Nora Radcliffe pointed out. It will not give mothers the right to breastfeed their children in public places, because they already have that right. However, the bill will make it a criminal offence to prevent a mother from feeding milk to her child in a public place. It will create a criminal offence to harass a mother in that way, which must be right.

We all want more children to be fed naturally. Everyone agrees that breast is best for the health of both mothers and babies. We must send a clear message to society that people's attitudes to the subject must change.

People who prevent mothers from feeding breast milk to their children in a public place must not be able to do so. We need this legislation, just as we needed legislation to get people to wear seat belts in their cars, as I mentioned earlier. Educational campaigns were not enough in themselves to change people's attitudes and they are not enough now. That is why we need this bill, which I urge members of all parties to support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I call Nanette Milne to close for the Conservatives. At this point, we are quite a bit ahead of the clock.

16:25

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am sorry to disappoint you, Presiding Officer, but I think that my speech might not last the full length of time that is allotted to me.

We are all agreed that breastfeeding is good for babies and good for mothers. The health benefits of it are not in dispute and it should be encouraged whenever possible. I would welcome a return to a culture in which breastfeeding is the accepted norm and I applaud Elaine Smith for what she is

trying to do and for the hard work that she has put in in bringing her bill to this stage 1 debate. However, I remain to be persuaded that legislating to force proprietors to allow breastfeeding on their premises under threat of prosecution for a criminal offence is the way in which to win hearts and minds or to increase the number of mothers who breastfeed their infants. As David Davidson said, the civil law can cope with the worst examples that we have heard today. I have to say that I do not share Bruce McFee's conviction that legislation will be effective in changing social attitudes.

In present-day society, many mothers find it more convenient to bottle feed for a number of reasons, such as wanting to share the burden of feeding, to get back to work, to have more time for themselves or to find out how much milk the baby is taking. It is also true that some mothers are put off by the fear of embarrassment if they breastfeed in public. However, many women have no desire to breastfeed or bottle feed in public and would rather have that enjoyable and intimate contact with their babies at home or in private when not at home. I would like more business proprietors to provide comfortable facilities for private breastfeeding on their premises.

Elaine Smith: Does Nanette Milne agree that providing private facilities forces women to be segregated from the rest of society? They might not be able to sit and have a coffee with their friends, for example. If they go to their GP's practice, why should they have to be segregated? I tried to let Nanette Milne in when I was speaking, but she did not want to intervene. I ask the question again. When she says that shops and restaurants should be free to decide whether mothers should be allowed to breastfeed on their premises, is she condoning the expulsion of breastfeeding mums and babies?

Mrs Milne: I am not condoning arrogant attitudes to breastfeeding mums; I am saying that a number of mums do not want to breastfeed in public and I would like there to be private facilities for those mums who do not want to breastfeed or bottle feed in public.

Much has been done in recent years to promote breastfeeding in Scotland and I was pleased to hear the minister's comments about the strategy to make further progress in that regard. In Scotland, rates of breastfeeding have increased by 8 per cent since 1995, which is more than double the rate of the increase across the United Kingdom. Even in areas of deprivation, the rate has increased by 7 per cent. We are moving in the right direction.

Public attitudes are changing. In recent surveys, a large majority of people said that they found discreet breastfeeding in public to be perfectly acceptable. That positive change in social

attitudes to feeding infants in public is welcome and has come about without Government intervention.

An increasing number of establishments welcome breastfeeding and I firmly believe that encouragement without coercion would lead to that becoming the norm. In countries where there is already legislation on breastfeeding, it is hard to find any evidence of the effect of that legislation on rates of or attitudes towards breastfeeding and there seem to be few examples of such a law being enforced. As we have heard, it is unlikely that the police and procurators fiscal will be willing to undertake prosecutions under the bill given that they have such a large amount of serious criminal work to deal with. Furthermore, there is a concern, as voiced by ACPOS, that the use of criminal legislation could lead to a negative attitude towards breastfeeding.

This afternoon, Elaine Smith, Helen Eadie and others recounted some appalling examples of bigotry and maltreatment of nursing mothers who wish to breastfeed in public. I do not condone what happened in those examples. I listened to the BBC this morning and a number of the e-mails that had been sent in made it clear that many people in the country deplore those bigoted attitudes. The desired cultural change is already under way. Of course, we have not heard about any good examples today, but I suppose that that is the nature of a debate such as this.

I point out to Carolyn Leckie that the formula milk that is provided to third-world countries as state aid has saved the lives of many babies whose mothers are starving and unable to provide the milk that their babies need. Formula milk is not all bad when it is sent to the third world.

I gently take exception to Eleanor Scott's statement that a child has a right to be fed human milk. I am not sure whether she meant to say that, but the statement is upsetting to those mothers, such as adoptive mums, who are physically not capable of breastfeeding their children. I hope that she accepts that that is a fair comment.

To conclude, I speak for my party when I say that we fully support the promotion of breastfeeding in Scotland. We have no bias against breastfeeding in public and we welcome the change in public attitude. However, we do not see the necessity for a criminal law to move that change forward. Moreover, we do not think that such a law would be effective, because it would result in few, if any, prosecutions. I commend the work that Elaine Smith has done on the bill, but we remain of the opinion that we should encourage and assist the continuing evolutionary change in public attitudes to take its course. Therefore—I am sorry—we cannot support the general principles of the bill.

16:31

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Ken Macintosh said that no one is questioning the fact that it is best for children to be breastfed where that is possible. I agree. The question today is: by what route should we meet the targets?

To reflect what Elaine Smith said about compulsion, it is a fact that, in the field of equality, more than in any other field, we do not achieve anything unless we legislate for it. The equal pay legislation is a case in point. I think that we have had that legislation for 40 years but, even so, women are still paid a lot less than men in percentage terms. It is disingenuous to pretend that we do not need to do anything.

I point out to Nanette Milne that we are not talking about creating a branch of the police force—the breast police—who will run about so that folk can report any violation. Deputy Chief Constable Mellor said:

“I sense that the creation of a criminal offence in this bill seems to be principally a symbolic act.”—[*Official Report, Health Committee*, 11 May 2004; c 866.]

He accepts that the existence of an offence on the statute book means that people start to change their culture. That is what the bill is all about. The bill that Elaine Smith is promoting will never change attitudes if it does not have some teeth.

I mentioned equality legislation, but that is reserved to Westminster, so we cannot do anything about it here; Elaine Smith has not been able to go down the anti-discrimination route. It is a credit to her and Mike Dailly of the Govan Law Centre that they have come up with something as sensible as the bill that we are today considering at stage 1.

Section 1 of the bill does not affect Scottish licensing law; it does not say that any breastfeeding mother or anyone who wants to feed a baby with a bottle of milk can breenge into any premises and have the right to do so there. It does not

“prevent a business from excluding breastfeeding on its premises where the lawful custom or practice is to exclude children generally.”

The bill is about places where children and babies already go and are entitled to go. It is about the right of a child to be fed in that way.

It is interesting to read the World Health Organisation's international recommendations, which influence the targets that are set in this country. Not all the initiatives are possible, as Tricia Marwick said, but we can work towards achieving some of the targets that are reproduced in the policy memorandum to the bill. The Executive has started to go some way towards achieving those targets, but there is still a long

way to go. A bit more uniformity is required in the funding for the promotion of breastfeeding, but I think that all members are willing to work towards achieving that end.

I see that time is running out, so I will move on.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Feel free to develop your arguments, if you wish.

Linda Fabiani: You do not say that very often, Presiding Officer. Okay, I will have a rant.

As Carolyn Leckie mentioned when she picked up on the issue that David Davidson raised about the powdered milk that was promoted in NHS premises in this country, it is ridiculous that powdered milk is still promoted in non-developed countries. It is all very well for Nanette Milne to say what she did, but we all know that some companies actively tell mothers in non-developed countries that breast milk is bad and that powdered milk is good. That is all about the companies promoting their products and their profits. Given that we are considering today whether the Parliament should legislate to provide rights in this country, I hope that all members will agree that we should take an interest in promoting fairness in that respect in undeveloped countries as well. It is a strange anomaly that powdered milk, which must be mixed with water, is actively promoted in countries in which one cannot be sure that the water supply is safe for drinking, let alone for mixing with powdered milk for babies.

Elaine Smith: On that point, does the member agree that it is amazing that companies make so much profit from ensuring that the artificial milk is as like a mother's milk as possible, yet the world's poorest and most oppressed people are women, who are the producers of the real thing?

Linda Fabiani: I agree that that is absolutely ridiculous. Of course the World Trade Organisation's rules are ridiculous and bizarre. We are talking about ensuring equality and fairness for people in this country, but we should extend that by pushing our Governments to promote equality and fairness all over the world. Dealing with mothers and babies is surely a good place to start.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call on Susan Deacon to wind up the debate. I am happy to allow her the same latitude as I have given to other speakers.

16:37

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): It is not often that I am given latitude by the Presiding Officer, but I am happy to take it on this occasion.

I am pleased to close the debate and I thank Elaine Smith for giving me the opportunity to do

so. I pay tribute to her for her work, commitment and sheer tenacity in promoting the bill. Frankly, she has been a real champion in the Parliament of breastfeeding. As Ken Macintosh said, the discussion surrounding the bill has already done a huge amount to raise awareness and to change culture and attitudes. That is a significant achievement in itself.

I thank members of the Health Committee for their assiduous consideration of the bill and for their thorough stage 1 report. I am delighted that the committee agreed to support the general principles of the bill. On behalf of all members in the chamber, I record our appreciation to all those—far too many to mention—who have given of their time and energy in their input to the initial consultation and in their evidence to the committee. I thank them for the information, evidence and anecdotes that they shared with us. That wealth of knowledge and experience has greatly aided our understanding both of the issues involved and of the real experiences of women across Scotland.

Finally, I thank all members who have contributed to today's thoughtful debate. We have heard some well-informed and heartfelt speeches. I am sure that we all thank Maureen Macmillan, Carolyn Leckie and Ken Macintosh for sharing with us some personal, honest and humorous anecdotes, which brought to life some of the issues that are involved in the debate.

We said from the outset in this Parliament that we wanted to give all Scotland's children the best possible start in life. That commitment has been a thread that has run through many Executive policies and much of the Parliament's legislation. I was pleased to hear Malcolm Chisholm speak so fully and passionately about the issue and I very much welcome the extent of the Executive's commitment to promote breastfeeding and the fact that it is happy to see the bill progress.

The importance of ensuring that babies get the right nurture and nutrition from the first days and weeks of their lives must not be underestimated. Common sense as well as a huge body of evidence tells us that the health and other life outcomes of our young are shaped from a very early stage. The bill addresses only one aspect of what is a big subject—the health and well-being of our young—but that aspect is vital.

The health benefits of breastfeeding for babies and mothers have long been established, as many members have said. There is also a long-established consensus within the public policy community and across the political spectrum that efforts should be made to promote breastfeeding and to encourage more women to breastfeed and to do so for longer. The question then arises as to how to make that happen.

As members have said, a great deal of progress has been made towards achieving the target that the Conservative Government set back in the 1990s of 50 per cent of mothers breastfeeding for six weeks or more by 2005. Malcolm Chisholm set out for us some of the excellent work that has been done in our maternity units—for example, through the UNICEF baby-friendly initiative. Other members referred to the work of health visitors and midwives in the community and to voluntary organisations working in the community. However, something still stands in the way of change.

I take this opportunity to endorse strongly the comments made by Tricia Marwick, Bruce McFee and Nora Radcliffe that a mother should, of course, always be respected for her choice of feeding method. That is a personal decision and no one should be made to feel guilty because they choose not to breastfeed or, in some cases, because they are unable to breastfeed. The fact remains that, despite all the support and information, many more women would like to breastfeed than do and many who breastfeed would like to do so for longer.

The Health Committee's report and the evidence that was heard throughout the committee's discussion of the bill have proven beyond any doubt that culture and attitudes lie at the heart of the question. Scotland has a culture that remains stubbornly unfriendly to breastfeeding. As Elaine Smith said, survey evidence shows that the majority of people are relaxed about seeing breastfeeding in public and are supportive of it, but women do not feel that they are. Ken Macintosh was honest in his account of what many individuals—men and women—grapple with, which is our rational perspective on these matters versus how we feel as products of our society's deep-rooted cultural issues.

The feeling that breastfeeding is not publicly acceptable has been reinforced by the actions of some who have actively prevented women from breastfeeding their babies in public places. When the bill was first proposed, it was suggested that such incidents were isolated and that they were not a real issue for women. However, I would urge anyone who might still hold that view to read the evidence and the testimonies shared with the Health Committee and to listen to the sort of account that Helen Eadie shared with us earlier.

It is a fact that women across Scotland have been asked to get off buses, leave cafes, go into toilets in shops and, yes, even leave waiting rooms in doctors' and dentists' surgeries simply because they wanted to breastfeed their child. How can any of us claim, with any credibility, that we are working towards a national breastfeeding target, that we support breastfeeding or that we want to create a breastfeeding-friendly culture in

Scotland while standing by saying that such practices are acceptable?

Given the support in the debate for Elaine Smith's bill, I suspect that this is probably the point at which I should turn to those few members who have called into question the effectiveness of the measure. Let me deal with some of the points that David Davidson raised. He said that there was no evidence that such legislation was effective. I think that he is being selective in his reading. In the United States, for example, evidence has shown that four out of the five states that have achieved the highest increase in breastfeeding since 1992 had either introduced legislation that made it an offence to prevent a woman from breastfeeding in a public place or explicitly stated the rights of women to breastfeed in public. In Maine, after such a law had been in place for a year, there was a 20 per cent increase in breastfeeding. As others have said, evidence was heard throughout the Health Committee's consideration of the matter that a vast number of experts and professionals in the field truly believe that the bill will result in a change in practice and an increase in the rate of breastfeeding in Scotland.

David Davidson, in his continued bid to cast around for reasons to oppose the bill because of his ideological dogma in this terrain, said that the bill was not about education and that it did not say enough about health professionals and the like. I have not heard any member today or anyone who has engaged in the discussion of the bill in committee and elsewhere say anything other than that the bill needs to be part of a package of measures to encourage, promote and support breastfeeding in Scotland.

Excellent work has been done in the health service, in maternity units and in communities and I believe that we are progressing in the direction in which we all want to go. It is incumbent on those who think that the bill will not be effective to say what measures they would propose to bring about the change that we all want to see.

Mr Davidson: The Conservatives support the role of breastfeeding, as we did when we were in government. We recognise its importance and believe that people should be encouraged and supported to breastfeed and to do so for longer. Our argument is not about the fact that the minister has taken up the initiative that we started when we were in government. As I said earlier, I welcome his comments on that.

However, responsibility for the issue has been in the hands of the Labour Westminster Government and the Executive for the past seven years. The Conservatives cannot take the blame for the fact that we have not reached where we would like to be. However, I find it refreshing that the minister is carrying on the work that we started. We started

off well; we got the rate up to 40 per cent without legislation.

I am suggesting that we get our professionals out there doing their job. The minister has to support that, because resources come from him. We need more people on the ground to deal with the matter. Vast sums of money have gone into the health service. Members should not point the finger at me.

Susan Deacon: I am genuinely disappointed by David Davidson's approach, as shown in that intervention. If ever there was an issue over which we could come together, work together and try to find common cause and a way forward, surely to goodness it is a public health issue such as this.

I am not interested in apportioning blame to anybody, whether a Tory Government of the past, a Labour Government since then or a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition Executive since then. I really do not care. What matters is how we achieve the target and ensure that Scotland genuinely becomes a much more breastfeeding-friendly place. All the information, evidence and anecdotes tell us that we are not yet there and that we will not get there unless we do something that will bring about a step change. The bill gives us an opportunity to do that.

I will be absolutely honest. Elaine Smith first discussed the proposal with me years ago when I was Minister for Health and Community Care. I was enthusiastic about the principle behind it, but I was terribly cautious about whether statutory change was the way forward. In matters of public health and lifestyle, it is right to tread carefully when considering whether to use the legislative powers of the Parliament and criminal law to bring about changes to behaviour. However, I believe absolutely that, just as in similar circumstances attitudes have shifted in the debate on smoking in public places, the consensus on breastfeeding has shifted not least because of the debate surrounding Elaine Smith's bill. The process of investigation that the committee has taken forward has brought out a latent pool of support for the measure and, critically, that will make a real difference. Those combined considerations should be enough to make every one of us support the measure irrespective of our party-political associations.

Mr Davidson *rose*—

Susan Deacon: I think we still have a lot of time. Will I take another intervention from David Davidson?

Members: No.

Susan Deacon: My colleagues are rather less enthusiastic than I am about taking a further intervention from him.

I will end my comments on the Conservatives by saying something about the critical issue of whether we should condone people asking a woman to leave a place because she is breastfeeding. Nanette Milne has said on record that cafe and restaurant owners, for example, should be allowed to decide whether to allow breastfeeding. I disagree with her view. It is not akin to allowing the owner of a pub to bar a disorderly drunk or allowing a shop to ask an abusive customer to leave. Breastfeeding is not some kind of offensive behaviour and it should not be treated as such; it is literally the most natural thing in the world. It is the right of babies to be fed when and where they need to be and in a way and place that their mothers choose as appropriate.

I note in passing, as Maureen Macmillan did, the hypocrisy that exists in our society in that respect. We live in a society that is happy to see the female body in all its splendour displayed in all sorts of forms, media and places, so surely we can cope with the sight of an infant tucked discreetly under its mum's jumper having a feed. That is what we want to promote and encourage through the bill, because we need to embed precisely that image in our culture as not only acceptable, but positive. As society becomes more comfortable with that image, women will become more comfortable and confident about breastfeeding their babies.

The debate is not esoteric, ideological or PC; it is about the real factors that influence women in their feeding choices. If a woman feels that she cannot breastfeed her baby in a park, shop, cafe or public library, she will either stay behind closed doors in her home, with all the implications that that has for her and the baby's physical and mental well-being, or she will simply give up. The evidence shows us that that is precisely what is happening now in Scotland.

Too many women have sat in smelly, cramped toilets feeding their babies, too many women—those who can—have turned car parks into feeding areas and too many women have not breastfed or have stopped breastfeeding, not because they wanted to, but because they felt that those around them would not like them to. The bill and the legal protection that it will provide to the rights of a baby to be fed by breast or bottle when and where it needs to be are necessary and right. I urge members from all parties to vote for Elaine Smith's motion to support the bill's general principles and to allow it to pass to its second stage. In so doing, we will make a real difference to the future of our society and the well-being of our children.

Business Motion

16:53

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-1732, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee reports to the Justice 2 Committee by 29 September 2004 on the Solicitors (Scotland) Act 1980 (Foreign Lawyers and Multi-national Practices) Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/383).—[Patricia Ferguson.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of 14 Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Patricia Ferguson to move motions S2M-1734 to S2M-1747, on the membership of committees.

16:54

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Patricia Ferguson):

I point out to the Parliament that I am moving 14 motions to allow members of the Scottish National Party to be moved around committees, but only five members of the SNP are present. Although I acknowledge that the SNP members have legitimate business elsewhere—at their conference in Inverness—I congratulate the five who are here on making the best decision and choosing their location wisely. [Interruption.] Mr Swinney has obviously found the voice that he did not have at the conference. I wonder whether the SNP has left behind its hardier members: those who can tolerate a crowd.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Andrew Welsh be appointed to replace Mr Kenny MacAskill on the Audit Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Christine Grahame be appointed to replace Ms Sandra White on the Communities Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Linda Fabiani be appointed to replace Stewart Stevenson on the Communities Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Michael Matheson be appointed to replace Brian Adam on the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Alasdair Morgan be appointed to replace Fergus Ewing on the Finance Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Stewart Stevenson be appointed to replace Michael Matheson on the Justice 1 Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Bruce McFee be appointed to replace Mr Stewart Maxwell on the Justice 1 Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Stewart Maxwell be appointed to replace Nicola Sturgeon on the Justice 2 Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Ms Sandra White be appointed to replace Linda Fabiani on the Public Petitions Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Bruce McFee be appointed to replace Bruce Crawford on the Procedures Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Linda Fabiani be appointed to replace Alex Neil on the Standards Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Adam Ingram be appointed to replace Alasdair Morgan on the Subordinate Legislation Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Fergus Ewing be appointed to replace Mr Bruce McFee on the Local Government and Transport Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Bruce Crawford be appointed to replace Mr Andrew Welsh on the Local Government and Transport Committee.—[*Patricia Ferguson.*]

Motion without Notice

16:55

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):
Under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders, I am willing to accept a motion without notice to bring forward decision time. I invite Patricia Ferguson to move such a motion on the Parliamentary Bureau's behalf.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees under Rule 11.2.4 of Standing Orders that Decision Time on Thursday 23 September 2004 be taken at 4.55 pm.—[*Patricia Ferguson.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

16:55

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

There are 19 questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-1733.1, in the name of Michael Matheson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1733, in the name of Frank McAveety, that a sporting Scotland is a successful Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)

Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 11, Against 75, Abstentions 8.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-1733.3, in the name of Jamie McGrigor, which seeks to amend motion S2M-1733, in the name of Frank McAveety, that a sporting Scotland is a successful Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 15, Against 78, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-1733.2, in the name of Dennis Canavan, which similarly seeks to amend motion S2M-1733, in the name of Frank McAveety, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)

Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 75, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S2M-1733, in the name of Frank McAveety, that a sporting Scotland is a successful Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)

Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 71, Against 0, Abstentions 24.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises the significant progress made since devolution in increasing participation in sport through the investment in active schools and the Scottish Executive's commitment to ensure that every child has at least two hours of high quality physical education; celebrates the continuing success of Scotland's sportsmen and women, particularly the medallists at the recent Olympics and those competing for medals at the Paralympics currently under way in Athens, of Andrew Murray at the US Open and most recently of Colin Montgomerie as part of the successful European team in the Ryder Cup; endorses the Executive's ambitions to attract major sporting events in Scotland, building on the successful rugby U21 World Cup; recognises the Executive's ambitions to invest in sports facilities for all talents and abilities, and seeks the support of all partners in meeting the challenges set out in Sport 21, the national strategy for sport in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-1640, in the name of Elaine Smith, on the general principles of the

Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.
 Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 80, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Breastfeeding etc. (Scotland) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If no member objects, I propose to put a single question on motions S2M-1734 to S2M-1747. The question is, that motions S2M-1734 to S2M-1747, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the membership of committees, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Andrew Welsh be appointed to replace Mr Kenny MacAskill on the Audit Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Christine Grahame be appointed to replace Ms Sandra White on the Communities Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Linda Fabiani be appointed to replace Stewart Stevenson on the Communities Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Michael Matheson be appointed to replace Brian Adam on the Enterprise and Culture Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Alasdair Morgan be appointed to replace Fergus Ewing on the Finance Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Stewart Stevenson be appointed to replace Michael Matheson on the Justice 1 Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Bruce McFee be appointed to replace Mr Stewart Maxwell on the Justice 1 Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Stewart Maxwell be appointed to replace Nicola Sturgeon on the Justice 2 Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Ms Sandra White be appointed to replace Linda Fabiani on the Public Petitions Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Bruce McFee be appointed to replace Bruce Crawford on the Procedures Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Linda Fabiani be appointed to replace Alex Neil on the Standards Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mr Adam Ingram be appointed to replace Alasdair Morgan on the Subordinate Legislation Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Fergus Ewing be appointed to replace Mr Bruce McFee on the Local Government and Transport Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Bruce Crawford be appointed to replace Mr Andrew Welsh on the Local Government and Transport Committee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow the usual brief period for members to leave the chamber before we proceed to the final item of business.

Scotland's Regiments

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-1590, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on Scotland's regiments. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the outstanding commitment and service of Scotland's six infantry regiments for this country over the centuries; further notes that the recent war in Iraq was the latest conflict which showed Scotland's regiments to be a modern, effective fighting force as well as institutions steeped in history and tradition; condemns the proposed loss of one of Scotland's regiments and the amalgamation of existing regiments into one or two new regiments, with the resultant loss of individual regimental identity and traditions; believes that, in a time of increased commitments across the globe, our armed forces must have the necessary resources and structure to protect our country, deter aggression and safeguard our vital interests in the wider world, and considers that the Scottish Executive should make urgent representations to the Ministry of Defence against these proposals in the interests of the Scottish economy and Scotland's military culture.

17:03

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank members from all different parties who have signed the motion and have come to the chamber this evening to show their support for Scotland's regiments. I welcome to the gallery representatives from the save the Scottish regiments campaign and from the various regimental associations, some of whom have travelled long distances to be here today. That is appreciated.

Members will be aware that General Jackson and the Ministry of Defence are proposing the loss of four infantry battalions from the British Army, which will involve the loss of one of the existing six Scottish battalions. The remaining five Scottish infantry regiments would then be merged into one or possibly two super-regiments, possibly with a Highland regiment and a Lowland regiment, or possibly one Scottish regiment. That proposal has led to a vigorous campaign of opposition throughout Scotland. I pay tribute to the regimental associations and to the save the Scottish regiments campaign for their energy and their vigour in highlighting the issue, and for their success in winning public opinion on to their side in defence of our historic regiments.

I am sure that members will appreciate the fact that serving soldiers have effectively been gagged on the issue by the Ministry of Defence—they are unable to speak out. However, I believe that their views are well represented by the regimental

associations and by those who are here with us in the public galleries.

I make no apology for speaking up in particular for the Black Watch, my local regiment, which recruits throughout most of the Mid Scotland and Fife region, which I represent. In so doing, I in no way wish to diminish the importance of the other five Scottish infantry regiments, and I would not wish the Black Watch to be preserved at the expense of any of the others. I am sure that other members who participate in the debate will speak up for their local regiments; I trust that they will forgive me for speaking up for my own.

I pay tribute to the excellent campaign that is being run by local newspapers in my area, including *The Courier* and the *Perthshire Advertiser*. The newspapers have helped to galvanise public opinion in defence of the Black Watch, and they have been extremely effective in raising public awareness on the issue.

Defence is, of course, a reserved matter. However, the Scottish regiments are important to the Scottish economy and to the culture of Scotland, with their military traditions and heritage. It is therefore only right that the Parliament should consider these issues.

I believe that there are four principal reasons why the Ministry of Defence's proposals are wrong, and I am sure that members will wish to add to those reasons during the debate. The first reason is that, at a time of increased military commitments, it makes no sense whatever for us to reduce the size of our armed forces. Members will recall the options for change agenda of the 1990s, which resulted in the merger of the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Highlanders. It is not my purpose to defend the options for change review, but I point out that it took place at a time when the Warsaw pact had collapsed, the iron curtain had come down and the cold war was over. It was felt that we were entitled to a peace dividend from those changes, with less reliance on our armed forces. The review took place against a background of increased use of high-technology weapons, pinpoint bombing from high altitude and so on, as we saw during the first gulf war in particular.

Whatever one's view on options for change, I do not think that anybody could reasonably argue that the same conditions persist today. We live in a world that is as uncertain now as it has been at any point in my lifetime. The present Government has taken on an increased number of military commitments, including those in Afghanistan and Iraq. At the same time, the nature of our commitment has changed. Increasingly, we have to deal with counter-terrorist activities and peacekeeping roles. In such ventures, high-technology weapons are of no use whatever. We

require infantry—highly trained and on the ground. As we have seen in the course of the engagement of the Black Watch in Iraq and elsewhere, the British Army is second to none in such roles, and I have no hesitation in saying that Scottish regiments are the best part of the British Army. To seek to reduce the size of our infantry against that background appears to be absolute madness.

The second reason is that, if we cut one of our regiments and merge the others, we will lose an important part of our military tradition and cultural heritage. The regimental system, which is a real strength of the British Army, allows geographical areas to be linked to individual battalions. Strong bonds exist between communities and the battalions from them and that undoubtedly helps recruiting, as different generations of the same family sometimes join their local regiment. In the continuing drive towards modernisation in all aspects of life, some people might think that traditions are unimportant. I believe passionately that traditions are vital, and that they are what bind communities together. The strength of the public response to the save the Scottish regiments campaign shows that the public, too, value those traditions.

The Black Watch has existed since 1739, recruiting from Tayside and Fife. That connection with the local area ensures that the regiment is held in affection, even by those who have no direct military connections. The American and Canadian military forces, which would give their right arms to have the esprit de corps of the British infantry regiments, look on in disbelief as we consider ending our regimental tradition. It must be preserved.

The third reason why we must defend our regiments is that, once the regimental link with particular areas has been broken, it will be much easier for the Ministry of Defence to make cutbacks in the future. I understand that, under one of the scenarios that are being proposed, the new Scottish super-regiment or super-regiments would have battalions identified with some of the existing regiments, so that we would have, for example, the Highland Regiment (First Battalion, the Black Watch). However, experience elsewhere shows that such attempts to preserve regimental identity simply do not stand the passage of time. Once the link between the regiment and its geographical recruiting area is broken, it is only a matter of time before the individual identity of the regiment is lost.

The best example of that is what happened with the Royal Anglian Regiment, which was formed more than 30 years ago from local regiments in the east of England. It started off as seven battalions, each of which was identified with a particular area—Lincolnshire, Suffolk and so on—

but once the local ties were severed, it became much easier for the Ministry of Defence mandarins to target the regiment for cutbacks. From seven battalions, the Royal Anglian Regiment now has merely two. I fear that that will be the fate of the Scottish regiments if we do not make a stand now.

I do not wish to take up more time, because I know that many members wish to contribute to the debate and have their own points to make. I shall simply close on my fourth and final point, which I feel is the most compelling of all. As we gather here, Scottish soldiers are serving in Iraq, with the Black Watch back in Basra for the second time in a year. Soldiers are putting their lives at risk daily on the orders of politicians in this country. Both the Black Watch and the Royal Highland Fusiliers have already lost young men who have made the supreme sacrifice. It would be an act of the most supreme betrayal for politicians at home to decide to extinguish the very regiments whose men are risking their lives in defence of our interests.

For all the reasons that I have set out, but particularly for that last reason, I believe that we must defend our historic Scottish regiments. The Scottish Executive should make urgent representations to the Ministry of Defence against those proposals, and the Scottish Parliament should say with one voice to Geoff Hoon and to General Jackson, "It's time to go home and think again."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Because of the high number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I must ask all members to stick strictly to the four-minute time limit for speeches. Later, I shall invite a motion to extend the debate, because I want all members to be able to participate.

17:12

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): I thank Murdo Fraser for bringing the debate to Parliament today. Huge numbers of my generation have strong connections with Scottish regiments, having served their country in Scottish regiments during the 1939-45 war. Many of them literally carry the scars of that association, but over and above the signs of physical wounds are the mental trauma and scars that they will carry to their graves, and their memories of comrades and friends who fought and died for their country and for their regiment.

Callous and uncaring number crunchers at Westminster have decided to cut overall costs by such measures as amalgamation and by savagely doing away with proud regiments. Those same regiments are legendary and world renowned, yet faceless bureaucrats can dismiss them as if their great heritage counted for absolutely nothing.

They should tell that to the D-day veterans or the Arnhem survivors. Loyalty should never be a one-way corridor; if and when it is given, it is also entitled to be reciprocated. Sadly, past experience tells us that such reciprocity is all too often lacking, at least as far as the aforementioned number crunchers are concerned.

If it is simply a straightforward case of economic cost saving, why do not they take a long hard look at the big picture? We as taxpayers have paid, and are still paying, countless billions of pounds for the stupid luxury of keeping nuclear weapons at Faslane. The only purpose that they serve—we all know that since the end of the cold war there is positively no possible chance of those weapons of mass destruction ever being used in retaliation or anger—

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will Mr Swinburne take an intervention?

John Swinburne: Certainly.

Mr Monteith: Can Mr Swinburne give me a guarantee that there will never be a coup d'état in Russia?

John Swinburne: The member may live in his little world—I will live in the real world.

The only purpose that nuclear weapons serve is to prevent Tony Blair from having to go

“naked into the conference chamber”,

to quote Aneurin Bevan. Bevan made that famous statement about the British Foreign Secretary 50 years ago. Surely it is time for us to stop hoarding such useless lethal weapons of mass destruction and to plough the money that would be saved into much-needed finance for the proud Scottish regiments, which are second to none in carrying out genuine peacekeeping roles throughout the world. Let us get rid of the weapons of mass destruction at Faslane and let us save the Scottish regiments and use the surplus to improve the situation of pensioners.

17:15

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): I represent Royal Scots territory and my father was a soldier in the King's Own Scottish Borderers. I am totally committed to the crucial role of Scottish servicemen and women in the armed forces of this United Kingdom.

There is a sense of déjà vu about today's debate. I was a member of the Defence Select Committee of the House of Commons when the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Highlanders were amalgamated under a scheme called options for change and a Secretary of State for Defence called Tom King. Correct me if I am

wrong, but I think that he is a member of the Conservative and Unionist Party.

This is an issue that keeps coming back. I am sorry to contradict good rants from either side of the chamber, but the matter has very little to do with politics. There are people in the top brass of the military—we have already heard about General Jackson—who reckon that they could organise a highly specialised modern army more efficiently without the sort of regimental structure that we have inherited from the past. A hell of a lot of us disagree with that point of view, but people keep reopening the issue and we are seeing that again today. It happens under ministers of every Government.

As I represent part of the territory of the first regiment of foot in the British Army—Pontius Pilate's bodyguard, or the Royal Scots—I am acutely aware of the value and ethos of Scotland's great infantry regiments. With the benefit of my brief time in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I am well aware of the wonderful work that they do, both at home and abroad. I hope that my colleagues at Westminster will prevail against the military top brass, in this case General Jackson. Some of us remember him from a little earlier in his career, when he was affectionately known as the “Prince of Darkness”; I am afraid that he is at it again. I hope that MPs will prevail against him, just as they prevailed against Tom King 10 years ago.

I cannot resist the temptation to make a couple of quick political points. It is a little irresponsible for the Conservative and Unionist Party to raise defence issues in this devolved Parliament. That sort of initiative can only play into the hands of nationalists who want to break up the United Kingdom and take regiments such as the Royal Scots out of the British Army altogether.

I turn now to the nationalists. They are people who never stop criticising the deployment of Britain's armed forces. I remember their imperial leader, who is now based down in London, referring to “unpardonable folly” when our forces liberated the Albanian people of Kosovo. He was wrong: we were right to deploy those troops and, as I see it, they did a wonderful job. The nationalist party would take Scotland's soldiers out of the British Army and probably out of NATO. It would run down our military to a sort of ceremonial gendarmerie, probably manned by kilted conscripts. Notwithstanding that, some nationalists have the brass neck to rally to the colours of our great British regiments, just because they see that there is some political capital to be made. That is not terribly edifying or very convincing. We should return to the big issue. I apologise for digressing.

When faced with Tom King's cuts, we minimised the damage to the Scottish infantry division

because our infantry battalions were very well recruited. The problem today is that they are less well recruited. That is a problem of economic success. At a time of near-full employment, a career in the armed forces is a little less attractive. I know that some of our Scottish battalions depend heavily on recruits from the southern hemisphere. Not long ago I met some of them, including Fijians, South Africans, Zimbabweans and Australians.

The message that we ought to put out is that there is a great career to be had in the armed forces: a valuable career, a professional career and an honourable career. I have seen with my own eyes the wonderful peacekeeping operations that are carried out by the British armed forces in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait and other parts of the world. I hope that the whole Parliament will support the Royal Scots, the King's Own Scottish Borderers, the Black Watch and the rest of our Scottish units in the British armed forces both now and in the future.

17:20

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): It is always a considerable pleasure to follow John Home Robertson in debates such as this. I have done so many times in the House of Commons and it is a great privilege to do it in this Parliament.

If his concern is that the issue, which is a reserved matter, has been raised in the Scottish Parliament, I reassure him that my parliamentary colleague, the member of Parliament for North Tayside, secured a debate in Westminster Hall a couple of weeks ago in which the issue was aired and to which the Secretary of State for Defence responded. John Home Robertson will be pleased to know that the nationalist party has been prepared to raise the issue in the House of Commons before it was raised in this Parliament.

I congratulate Murdo Fraser on bringing the debate to the Scottish Parliament. It is a matter of regret for me that the debate is necessary in the first place. As I am sure John Home Robertson will know, I was and remain an opponent of the war in Iraq. That war was illegal and has led to instability in the middle east and to great human suffering. Although I was no supporter of the war in Iraq, I recognise and appreciate what soldiers have to do—in much more dangerous circumstances than I will ever have to face in my life—to pursue the Government's objectives. It is atrocious that while soldiers are in Iraq facing jeopardy, the Government is carrying out a review of the regimental structure and placing great uncertainty over the future of those individuals and regiments.

The Government has raised the certainty of fundamental change, the certainty of the abolition of a regiment and the consequent loss of identity,

which has been a very successful device in recruiting many people into our armed forces. What sort of way is that for the Government to treat soldiers who are operating in a very dangerous situation?

We are told that the world is a much less safe place—I agree fundamentally with that view—as a result of some of the actions that have been undertaken in the past few years. Our troops are currently active in Iraq and Afghanistan and there will clearly be a need for further overseas activity for our forces. Therefore, why does the Government believe that this is the time to reduce the number of infantry personnel, who are carrying out the work that the Government requires them to do?

Recruitment to the forces is based on the strength of the local roots of the regiments. In my constituency, the traditional association with the Black Watch has been the source of many recruits. Traditional links with communities are a reliable method of recruitment that will be lost if the Government does not change direction.

In my locality there has been a strong local campaign to protect the regiments. The campaign has been endorsed and enthusiastically supported by our local media: *The Courier* and the *Perthshire Advertiser*. I hope that the Government will listen to the campaign by those organisations, the ordinary people and this Parliament in Scotland.

I can express the concerns on the issue no better than by quoting a letter—one of many letters that I have received from serving Black Watch officers and soldiers. In that Letter, a young man from my home village of Burrelton in Perthshire wrote:

"I have been a proud member of the Black Watch for a year, and in that year I have learned some of the best skills and teamwork that people in civvie jobs can dream about."

He asked me to walk past the war memorial in our village and to recall the sacrifice that has been made by his predecessors to make the regiment what it is today. It is essential that in the debate we protect that sentiment and that pride.

The issue affects all of Scotland and all our communities. I urge the Scottish Executive to make the strongest possible representations to the Ministry of Defence. The First Minister said that he would listen to the case—I hope that he is listening now and will make representations.

I will close on the issue of *déjà vu*, which John Home Robertson brought to the debate. In 1993, when the Conservatives—I presume—were cutting our regiments and the Labour Party was defending them, Dr John Reid, the current member of Parliament for Hamilton North and Bellshill and the best Secretary of State for Defence that we never had, said:

"It is a disgrace and a disservice to our soldiers that we are spending £3,000 million on a new nuclear weapon which is not needed—while we are putting them on the dole, giving them compulsory redundancy and disbanding infantry regiments which are needed to deal with the very threats that we now face."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 24 February 1993; Vol 219, c 908.]

I could not agree more with Dr Reid and I suggest that the Secretary of State for Defence ask him for some advice. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they must stick to four-minute speeches and I remind members of the public that it is not appropriate to applaud.

17:25

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I hope that a former national service gunner may be allowed to speak on behalf of the Scottish infantry regiments. Members have covered many of the points well, but I will stress a few.

First, political pressures might play a part, but the top brass likes to play with toys; it is universal among men to love to play with expensive toys. The worst and most expensive toys are atomic weapons, but there are all sorts of other hardware and it is rather fun to have the latest high-tech thing. The top brass spend lots of money on such hardware, but ultimately the show is run by the men or women who carry guns, whether they are on foot, in a small vehicle, or being dropped by helicopter.

We have to have people on the ground, as is clearly demonstrated by the situation in Afghanistan, where we have failed to capitalise on our initial success and the situation is going to pigs and whistles because there are not enough people to run things. The problem is also demonstrated in different ways in Northern Ireland, the Balkans and Iraq. Everything depends on infantry being well trained in the necessary activities. We need to sort out the people who love to play with expensive hardware and ensure that we invest in real people instead of expensive toys.

The social benefit of the forces is another aspect of the debate. There would be a loss to many communities if we were to stop recruiting from them. If there are to be no barracks in the huge chunk of Scotland that is north of Edinburgh—I believe that that is a possibility—people will just not join up. It will not occur to them to do so, because they will not see the forces. In communities, the forces—the Army in particular—perform a great service. Many young men and women join up and receive good training in skills that they can use in the other world when they leave the forces. They learn to work with other people and to do as they are told, and they learn to take command and to show initiative. In

particular, many young men who are perhaps fairly aggressive by nature learn to channel and control their aggression. The Army sorts them out and when they come out they are good, civilised citizens. If they had never joined up, they might have ended up in jail. The Army does a huge amount of good and we must support it.

It is obvious that some areas are finding it hard to recruit, because people just see that regiments are threatened with closure. When a hospital is threatened with closure nobody applies to work there and the powers that be can close it down—the same tactic is being used now and the bad publicity discourages people. If we made a serious effort to recruit for the regiments throughout Scotland and had a proper system that encouraged local loyalties, we would do much for communities, for the Army and for the countries in which our Army works so well and we would not have so many ridiculous pieces of equipment that we never use.

17:29

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): It is appropriate that the Parliament should debate Murdo Fraser's motion. When people such as John Home Robertson campaigned for devolution, one of the arguments that they put forward was that the Scottish Parliament would be able to lobby the UK Government on issues of importance to Scotland. I sense that when we have the next Conservative UK Government, Mr Home Robertson and his ilk will not be so precious about making known to that UK Government what they claim to be the views of Scotland.

Devolved issues clearly do flow from any decision to cut our regiments—the economic issues to which Murdo Fraser and others have referred. These days, we are all familiar with the formulas produced by DTZ Pidea Consulting, and other organisations, that extrapolate the direct jobs that are lost during such changes and the wider impact on the community. There is no doubt that the closure of barracks and the implied changes will have that kind of economic effect, particularly in parts of rural Scotland.

This Parliament also has a responsibility in relation to cultural matters. During the summer, when my colleague Peter Duncan MP and I gathered signatures for a petition to save the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Royal Scots, I was struck by the depth of feeling for the regiments in our communities across Scotland. It was not just the usual suspects in the shape of former service people who came forward; it was people from all sections of our community. They value the contribution that has been made by people from their community. Like John Swinney, they have passed by the war memorials in their

communities. They know the sacrifice that has been made and they do not want to see it just brushed aside. That is why so many people have signed the many petitions raised by ex-servicemen and politicians. Indeed, 10,000 people have signed our petition, which we will present to 10 Downing Street on 4 October.

It would be good if we were able to get cross-party consensus on the case for Scotland's regiments. However, we must be clear on what the bottom line is of other people who are making the case. Peter Duncan and I have volunteered to sign a petition orchestrated by the Labour MP Russell Brown if he will tell us what his bottom line is. It is clear to me that the bottom line for people who are signing our petition is not a cap-badge arrangement where the name is kept but the entire structure is removed. We must be clear on that, because I agree with John Home Robertson that Labour MPs from Scotland will have a pivotal role in determining the final decision. It will be the strength of their backbone in standing up to the UK Government that will determine the outcome. Let us hope that they have that backbone.

17:33

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank my regional colleague Murdo Fraser for bringing this debate.

We need to cut spending on militarism and defence. We need to do that because we spend more on the military than we do on transport, housing and law and order. However, the priorities for cutting defence spending should start with weapons of mass destruction.

During its lifetime, and including the infrastructure that is required to support it, the Trident nuclear weapons system will cost £50,000 million. Yesterday, we spent four and a half hours in the chamber debating the cost of Holyrood, which is £431 million. We could build Holyrood 116 times over for the cost of Trident.

What then is the role of our conventional troops in the 21st century? Conventional troops make up about one third of the defence budget. Their primary role is peacekeeping, humanitarian work and disaster relief in an uncertain world. I want to see the soldiers of the Black Watch on my television at night. I want to see them performing humanitarian duties. I do not want to see them involved in an illegal war in Iraq. I want to see them proudly wearing their red hackles, but along with the red hackle, I want to see them wearing the blue armband of the United Nations.

Military personnel and civilians share a deep sense of tradition, of commitment to place and community, and of the generational history of service and duty that is connected with the

Scottish regiments. I do not rule out, at some future date, some form of amalgamation or streamlining or efficiency savings within the Scottish regiments, but we have to look at two reasons why recruitment is down, and why the viability of the regiments is being called into question. The first is the illegal war and the illegal use of our military forces, which are not backed by the majority of people in this country. If people want reasons why young people do not want to join the military, there is the first one. The second reason is that there has been a breakdown in the link to local recruitment and local tradition, because no local teams—either connected to battalions or to Scottish regiments—are working on local recruitment or have connections with local areas.

We must sort out those two reasons first, regardless of any future changes in structure that are introduced. However, the priority must be to cut weapons of mass destruction, to cut Trident and to cut the spending that is 116 times the cost of this Parliament, because the cold war finished a long time ago.

17:36

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I am pleased to be called to speak in this debate, and I too congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing it.

I am very proud that for most of my working life I was a soldier. Indeed, on my first tour of duty back in 1980 I was attached to the Scottish infantry division, and I had the privilege of helping to train our infantry soldiers based in Scotland. That training no longer takes place in Scotland. In those days, there were seven infantry regiments in the Scottish division—the magnificent seven. Now, of course, there are only six regiments, and the focus of this debate is on the threat to reduce that figure even further.

I cannot believe that in this day and age, with all the threats that we face from international terrorism, the Government is even considering further cutting the number of Scottish infantry regiments. I could understand its position if, after the cold war ended, we faced a peaceful world, where such numbers of troops were not needed, but that is not the case. Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Bosnia and now Iraq are all theatres of operations, and have been added to Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the Falklands and many other far-flung places, not to mention our commitment to European co-operation through our troops based in Germany. No, reducing the British Army to such low levels as are currently proposed, and doing away with our single-battalion regiments, is fundamentally flawed.

Who in their right mind would throw away in this way the military advantage that the regimental system provides? It seems that General Jackson would. He does not come from the single-battalion regimental system, but unfortunately he seeks to get rid of it. The regimental system that we have in Scotland is essential for maintaining public support for our armed forces, and has certainly added value in military operations.

The British Army has always been successful at modernising while retaining important traditions. The regimental system for Scotland is such an important tradition. What the UK Government seems to be proposing would see Scotland treated as simply a region of the United Kingdom, with one regiment for the whole nation of Scotland. While that might be appropriate for the English regions, it fails to recognise the regional dimension within the nation of Scotland. The proposals are fundamentally flawed, and are certainly not being driven by Scottish interests.

To those who say that as MSPs we have no locus in this matter, I respectfully suggest that we have a duty to speak up for the interests of Scotland. The issue is too important to leave to the UK Parliament alone, dominated—as it must be—by those who represent English constituencies. Scotland should speak with one voice, and it should say no to these ridiculous plans.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Under rule 8.14.3, I invite a motion to extend the debate.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by 25 minutes.—[Murdo Fraser.]

Motion agreed to.

17:40

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Given that I am a Conservative member, members may not be surprised to discover that I believe in the success of the long tradition of the United Kingdom, which, with the history of the empire, brings with it a military tradition. As we sit here before many veterans of the armed services in Scotland who have come to the Parliament to demonstrate their views, we must remember the service that they have given the United Kingdom. It is for that reason that I remind members that the United Kingdom has had a role in the past that was more than simply defending its borders and that that role must continue in future. We should keep that clearly in our minds as we decide what will happen with our nation's army.

I come from the north-east of Scotland, which is divided into two parts. The southern part was traditionally a recruiting area for the Black Watch, while the northern part was traditionally for the

Gordon Highlanders. The comparison of the two is important and should be done. It has been my pleasure to go out on the streets of Montrose with my good friend Sid Mather, who is in the public gallery today, to collect signatures from people who are genuinely concerned about the future of the Black Watch regiment. A huge campaign has been built around the Black Watch by people such as Murdo Fraser and his colleagues in the Perth area. *The Courier* newspaper has been great at supporting the campaign.

The area further north used to recruit for the Gordon Highlanders, but that regiment was merged in the recent past and the successor seems to have lost part of the identity and loyalty that the traditional regimental system delivered. We should keep that comparison close to our hearts because if we make the mistake of ending our traditional regiments and dissociating loyal regions from the regiments that recruited there, we will be in grave danger of undermining not only the ability of our regiments, but the traditions that support them.

It would be inappropriate of me not to raise what is perhaps a side issue—that of 45 Commando in Arbroath. In a letter to me, Adam Ingram, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, made it clear that 45 Commando may be under threat as part of the review. Given that I represent the north-east of Scotland, I think that it is essential that we consider not only the interests of our regiments, but also the tradition that the marines at 45 Commando have had in the area. We must do all that we can to defend their tradition and presence in Scotland in the long term.

It is important to remember that the United Kingdom has responsibilities that involve heavy defence expenditure. It has been mentioned during the debate that some regiments have in the past been threatened by the diversion of funds into important projects and it would be remiss of me not to point out that we are in exactly the same situation today. Decisions must be made about the provision of aircraft for our air force and about aircraft carriers for our navy and aircraft to go on them. Huge amounts of military expenditure have been or will be committed in the not-too-distant future. We must balance that expenditure with the need to maintain in the long term an army that is capable of doing the job that it does today so that it can continue to do so for the good of world peace.

17:44

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing the debate. I express my unequivocal support for the retention of the identity of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, which recruits from Dumfries and Galloway, the Scottish Borders and Lanarkshire.

Before I say more about the KOSB, I want to put a few facts on the record because there is a bit of misinformation around about the defence review at Whitehall and the UK Government's intentions. This year's UK spending review settlement will provide a 1.4 per cent increase in real terms per annum for the next four years in defence spending, which amounts to £3.7 billion. That will mean that planned defence spending will have increased by 7 per cent between 1997 and 2007-08.

Murdo Fraser has had the good grace to admit that planned defence spending fell by 15 per cent—£4.2 billion—over the last three years of the Tory Government. In 1994, during that period, the Queen's Own Highlanders was merged with the Gordon Highlanders. That was the second merger of regiments under a Tory Government in under 35 years because, in 1961, the Queen's Own Highlanders was formed by the merger of two other regiments. The issue that we are discussing is not one that arises only under Labour Governments; it has arisen under other Governments as well.

The Tories have to bear in mind Oliver Letwin's commitment that all departments should have 0 per cent growth in budget over the first two years of the spending review period. That means that, under the Tories, the MOD would have its budget reduced by £2.6 billion, which would put more pressure on the Scottish regiments rather than less.

Mike Rumbles: The focus is not on defence spending but on the proposal to cut the number of troops.

Dr Murray: I know. I am getting on to that. I was merely placing some facts on the record.

I note that Mr Swinney has decided to stay with us rather than go to the SNP conference. Given that, in proportion to its population, Scotland has a higher number of members of the armed forces and a higher number of battalions than elsewhere in the UK, the SNP needs to say whether it has taken that into account in its calculations of the costs of independence.

I know that the defence review is intended to modernise the forces and to replace old or heavy tanks with lighter tanks and helicopters, which are more appropriate to modern warfare. However, I have serious concerns about the plans to reduce the number of people in the armed forces from 103,500 to 102,000. I appreciate that that reduction is only just over 1 per cent of the total number of people in the armed forces and I have been told that it can be achieved through natural wastage and that General Jackson's intention is that retraining should enable all battalions to be deployable rather than only the 26 or 27 that are

deployable at the moment. However, at a time when there is much unrest throughout the world and a great need for commitment to peacekeeping, humanitarian activity and so on, I wonder whether any reduction in Army numbers should be considered.

Mr Mundell is correct in noting that the King's Own Scottish Borderers is held in great esteem in Dumfries and Galloway. It has an excellent recruitment and retention record and has served with distinction throughout the world, most recently in Iraq. The loss of that regiment's local identity would seriously affect recruitment across the south of Scotland. I concur with Donald Gorrie's view that the threat of disbandment might also affect recruitment.

My friend and colleague Russell Brown, the MP for Dumfries, has spearheaded the campaign for the retention of the King's Own Scottish Borderers. He has collected more than 10,000 signatures on a petition that he is presenting to Geoff Hoon. I can do no better than to conclude by quoting a recent letter that he wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence, which I hope will reassure Mr Mundell about Russell Brown's bottom line:

"What I wish to see at the end of this process, is the continuing opportunity for young men and women from my local area, and further afield, to sign up with the KOSB".

17:48

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): As a member for North East Scotland, I am in no doubt that the Scottish regiments are a vital ingredient of the British Army and that the loss of individual regimental identities would seriously damage recruiting for the infantry in Scotland.

Regiments are close-knit units with their own histories, traditions and local family connections, which would be lost in amalgamated regiments, even were their names to survive. I spoke out against and lived through the demise of the Gordon Highlanders and, although the tartan and other parts of the uniform live on in the Highlanders regiment, there is not the same palpable emotional tie between the new regiment and the people of Aberdeen and the North East Scotland.

In the two years before I became an MSP, I spent some time as a volunteer in the Gordon Highlanders museum in Aberdeen, which was set up to perpetuate the memory of that great regiment and to educate people young and old in its glorious history and achievements. I helped to serve food to the many visitors whom we welcomed there from around the world, including people who had served in the Gordons and people whose husbands, fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers had given their service, and

sometimes their lives, to the regiment and who had enormous pride in its achievements. Many of their sons and grandsons would have signed up had the Gordons still been in existence. The love and pride were touching to see and brought home to me the power of the regimental system in the British Army.

Today, with the worldwide need for good foot-soldiers, whether to keep the peace in Ireland, Kosovo or Iraq or to defend our nation against aggressors, it is as crucial as it always has been to continue to recruit to the infantry and to retain the dedication and commitment that soldiers feel towards their regimental duties. It is vital that the Army continues to get high levels of support from the public so that people will join up and military expenditure will be accepted without resentment. The close geographical links and bonds between communities and battalions are made possible because of the regimental system in Scotland and to destroy that would result in the loss of a vital recruitment tool. Surely that would be madness in today's troubled world.

17:50

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I wanted to speak in this debate because I was incensed by the reported remark from some twit in the Ministry of Defence, who said, "If you want to save your Highland regiments, persuade your young people to join them."

In my grandfather's generation, my third cousin was killed in the first world war as a Gordon Highlander. My father fought in France, was captured at St Valery and spent five years as a prisoner of war as a Gordon Highlander. As a cadet in the University of Aberdeen officers training corps I wore the Gordon tartan with pride. When the Gordon Highlanders disappeared, recruitment plummeted in the north-east. Surely to goodness we can learn the lesson of history; instead of combining and destroying the Scottish regiments, the Ministry of Defence should be reinstating them.

17:51

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on the timing of the debate, because I gather that the Scottish colonels will meet fairly soon to put their recommendations to the Army board. I think that that will happen in October.

If one mentions the Gordon Highlanders, the Scottish Horse or the Scots Greys, that will often mean a family bond to people. Members of my family served in all those regiments. I live in the north-east and many of my relatives served in the Gordon Highlanders. When they come back to

visit Scotland, they proudly go to see the barracks and the places where they trained. They wear the tartan in their regimental associations and socially in other parts of the world. *The Scottish Banner* is a newspaper that is distributed throughout North America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and it is running campaigns in those places to raise awareness of the nonsense that is being proposed and the loss of our regimental tradition.

Earlier in the year, the Parliament kindly sent me to the Falkland Islands—it was not a punishment—and I had the privilege to pay a personal visit to the Royal Highland Fusiliers, which was training out there. The same chaps whom I met are now in Iraq—they were going there the day after my visit. They were up for it. Within their numbers were people from Fiji, Australia and Canada. Why did they join? I got to speak to the troops; I was not just talked at. They joined because of the name of the regiment. They did not just want to be in the British Army. They could identify that they wanted to come and serve in a Scottish regiment. Perhaps some of them saw it as a way out or as something to do, but they saw it as something that would give them long-term benefit, whether that was training, learning how to be disciplined—perhaps one or two had been in trouble—or learning a skill. One can do all that in the Army, but it is the attraction of a regiment that we are arguing about today: the continuing tradition and the esprit de corps that is essential when one is in the front line depending on one's colleagues.

Troops who are trickle posted around do not retain that bond in a time of need. It is a nonsense that Westminster has decided that the regiments will no longer do their own recruiting through their own budgets and that an outside contractor will do that work. I have no objection to contractors, but in this case there is a misapplication of outside contracting. It should be for the regiments to fight for their existence, to select and train the people whom they want and to be the effective force that they are for good in the world.

We hear stories from Westminster, such as, "We don't need extra troops now because we are out of Northern Ireland." What about the commitments that the Prime Minister has taken us into? That involved not only fighting Saddam but keeping the peace and protecting aid workers, and now we have the rise of terrorism. What on earth is going on?

The key to how we survive in the future is not budgeting but the quality of the people, the connections that they have with their regiments and the support that the regiments receive from their locality. The best recruiting tool has always been the local regiment with the local community. Frankly, I am astonished that this is going on.

I hope that everyone understands that those of us in the Scottish Parliament who care want Westminster to listen properly. This issue affects not just Scotland but the world.

17:55

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Those who choose to serve in our armed services do so out of a commitment to defend our nation and our values. Members of our armed services are bound together not only by a commitment to defend our borders but by a shared concern and pride and by the desire to protect their comrades.

As the youngest member, I have no military background but I am able to take my seat in this democratic Parliament. I can declare my allegiance to the monarch and serve my constituents because we live in a constitutional monarchy and a free democratic society thanks to the sacrifices of Borderers and others. Last year, I had the honour of being the only back bencher to visit the poppy factory in Edinburgh. I saw for myself the physical and mental effects of the commitment of those who are employed in that factory, where they serve others.

Each time I hold an advice surgery in a village hall in my constituency, it is a humbling experience to read the roll of honour and the roll of service. In more than four major conflicts, the Borders towns and villages have sent their young men and women to serve. Davidsons, Nixons, Purvises, Dodds—those are families whose members have served and died. They share the visible emotion that Nora Radcliffe mentioned in her speech.

I was born and brought up in Berwick, which is the home of the United Kingdom's first purpose-built barracks. For generations, Berwickers and Borderers have served across the region. Throughout its 300-year history, the KOSBs have been committed in conflicts. Most recently, they lost one of their fellows in Iraq. One village in the Borders will have its roll of honour updated.

I was a privileged guest at the opening of the war memorial in Peebles, where the Royal Scots has a proud history. I talked to serving officers and new recruits, so I wish to make a point about recruitment in this short speech.

I represent communities that are proud of their history, traditions and social bonds. The Borders regiments reflect that pride and are part of that history. With their presence at common ridings, festivals and gatherings, they recruit in the Borders and are part of that bond. Borderers do not join ignorant of the rolls of honour in which their family names, like mine, appear. My family has served in the KOSBs in the past and people wish to serve today. They want to be part of a

professional force that protects our shores and contributes to our peacekeeping commitments around the world.

Elaine Murray mentioned that defence spending is increasing. That is correct. However, our defence policy should not be simply an extension of the Pentagon's procurement policy, which favours electronic command and control at ever-increasing cost but with questionable efficacy. Of course we must have modern fully equipped armed forces that utilise technology that is co-ordinated with that of our allies. I support efficiency, value for money and the modernisation of our services for our commitments around the world, but we must have a commitment to the bond in our local areas.

Michael Moore and Sir Archy Kirkwood, who are my and Euan Robson's Westminster counterparts, lodged a petition last week in the Westminster Parliament. The petition says:

"The Petitioners highlight the proud military traditions of the Kings Own Scottish Borderers, the regiment's successful contributions to historic and recent military conflicts and peace-keeping missions around the world and its strong ties with the communities of the Scottish Borders in particular.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge Her Majesty's government to reconsider proposal which would reduce the number of Scottish battalions, to make provision for the retention of all of the Scottish regiments, and in particular to reject any plan to disband or amalgamate the King's Own Scottish Borderers."

17:59

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing a debate of such importance.

At a time when Iraq's new ambassador to the United Nations has asked Britain to increase its forces in Iraq, when British troops are still required in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Afghanistan, the Falklands and Cyprus—to name but a few—and when terrorism threatens peace and the democratic infrastructure all over the world, it is extraordinary that the British Government plans to cut four infantry battalions, including one Scottish regiment. It is outrageous, it defies logic and it is dangerous for the safety of our active service troops and civilians where danger exists. It is the wrong signal to give.

The chancellor, Gordon Brown, a Scotsman, is refusing more cash for defence spending because equipment projects—including the Eurofighter—have gone over budget. One thing that we in this country know is that, although superfighters and stealth bombers can partially win wars, they have to be supported by infantry, who are always needed to cope with the situations on the ground.

It is the poor, bloody infantry who have saved our country so many times in the past and who often take the brunt of the casualties, without always getting their fair share of the glory. Those Scottish foot-soldiers, who have always been ferocious in attack and who have formed famous and formidable defences—such as the Argylls' thin red line in the Crimean war—now face the prospect of being wiped out by a thin red line from Chancellor Gordon Brown's pen. That is disgraceful. We have more to fear from Whitehall than from any other potential enemy.

Senior Army officers have been muzzled and prevented from commenting on the proposed cuts in the regiments; nonetheless, Britain's most senior soldier in Iraq has openly criticised the plan. General John McColl, who is deputy commanding general of the multinational force in Iraq, has bluntly and bravely spoken out, saying that the size of the Army should be increased to allow it to cope with its growing number of commitments. That is a practical, front-line soldier speaking. If we are going to keep troops in Iraq until at least 2006—by which time there might, possibly, be Iraqi troops who can cope with the situation—it is vital to our Army's safety that it is at full strength, rather than being overstretched; otherwise, even more lives will be lost. Geoff Hoon must realise that before it is too late.

I will not dwell on the undisputed honours and glories of the past history of our valiant Scottish regiments; Murdo Fraser and others have already done so eloquently. However, the territorial link of the different regiments is an invaluable recruiting tool and we underestimate it at our peril. All the rumbling uncertainty has had an adverse effect on the morale of Scottish servicemen and women.

I end by saying that it is the primary duty of the Government at Westminster to ensure the security of our country and the safety of our civilians and armed forces. A policy of reducing our forces at this time is pretty well a dereliction of that duty and is certainly a disservice to the nation.

18:03

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): It may be stating the obvious, but it is particularly important to start by addressing the big question—which Murdo Fraser addressed at the beginning of the debate—of which aspects of this matter are reserved and which are devolved. Not only are decisions on the future of the British Army decisions for the Ministry of Defence, but it is hard to imagine a rational argument that said that those decisions should be for this Parliament, or for anyone else apart from defence ministers who are answerable to the House of Commons. Even those who wish to disband the United Kingdom

would, I suspect, accept that as long as there is a British Army the decisions about how it is structured and run should be taken by a British Government.

However, important aspects of such decisions impact on Scotland, as members have said. Because of that, I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing the debate. Not only is the defence of the United Kingdom essential for our safety and security, but it has significant impacts on the Scottish economy. In the past four years, the Ministry of Defence has placed almost 2,500 contracts in Scotland at a total value of approximately £2 billion. Many of those contracts sustain vital jobs in manufacturing, and many of those jobs involve high-value research and technology.

There are more than 14,000 service personnel and 7,000 civilian personnel in Scotland. With some 50 core defence sites, and many minor units, Scotland has one of the largest defence footprints of any part of the United Kingdom. Nearly 50,000 are employed in defence and related jobs. It is, in part, because of that context that Scottish ministers take an active interest in the Ministry of Defence proposals. Other UK Government departments also take an active interest in the economic aspects of defence policy; only a couple of weeks ago, I accompanied Jacqui Smith, a minister from the Department of Trade and Industry, on a visit to the BAE Systems naval shipyards on the Clyde. Like me, she was interested to ensure the best possible economic benefits for British companies from meeting our defence requirements.

Mike Rumbles: The minister talks about the important economic footprint of the Army and the Ministry of Defence in Scotland. Where in Scotland is the Scottish infantry trained?

Lewis Macdonald: The member raises an important point, but the issue that I think will be of concern to members is that although many Scottish infantry regiments are based outside Scotland—Dreghorn in Edinburgh is the only place in Scotland where a Scottish regiment is based in a training role—they should not, and cannot, be seen separately from the rest of the British Army. They are part of the British Army and the policies that we are debating tonight are UK-wide policies. That is the basis on which we should have the debate.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to hear the minister's comments in respect of the wider implications for recruitment and retention in Scotland. Will the minister also consider the social aspects and acknowledge that family life in the services is all important, and that the current levels of deployment are totally out of context?

Lewis Macdonald: We will come back to that, because we need to understand that the issue of families is part of what lies behind the Ministry of Defence proposals.

I want to move quickly to the main issue. John Home Robertson made the point that the issue of Britain's regimental structures has been raised before.

Mr Swinney: Before the minister moves on, I want to pick up on the comment that he made about the Scottish Government taking an active interest in the proposals. Will he tell us a bit more about what an active interest amounts to? Does it go as far as making a statement to the Ministry of Defence that the Scottish Government is opposed to the proposals that the Secretary of State for Defence is making?

Lewis Macdonald: I ask the member to have patience, because I will come to that very point.

As a result of the issue having been raised before, half our infantry regiments in the UK are already regiments of two or more battalions. A number of members have made the point that it is only 10 years ago that the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Highlanders were merged as a result of a similar set of proposals. Infantry structure is just one of the issues that are raised in the MOD's proposals this year. There is an important debate to be had about how the British Army should be structured in the future, but it is important to be clear about what is proposed and why.

I respond in particular to the suggestion that it is wrong to address such issues at a time when British soldiers are putting their lives at risk, not just in Iraq, but in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Those who know the history of the British Army will know that British soldiers have been in dangerous positions and conflict situations almost continuously for the past 60 years. It is precisely because of the risks that our soldiers take and the need to support them that the Government would be failing in its duty if it did not constantly keep in sight the need for reform and modernisation. However, any such proposals for change must be well considered and fully debated. They must take into account the strength of Scotland's infantry regiments, each of which has a strong base in its local area, has a reputation in the field that is second to none, commands local loyalties, confers identity on local areas and has a record down the centuries that is second to none.

It is important to recognise that a key part of what the MOD proposes is to end the arms plot. It proposes to do that partly on the basis of an argument that keeping regiments in a single location, rather than re-rolling them and redeploying them as has been done under the

arms plot, will be better for Army families and the full utilisation of Army strength. There is a good argument to be had there, but again, it is important to stress the nature of the MOD proposals. The MOD is proposing not to divert resources from the infantry into heavy armour or high technology, but to divert those resources into logistics, engineers, signallers and intelligence in order to support the infantry.

There is a valid and important argument to be had between trickle movement of troops and the arms plot, and between additional infantry battalions and additional support for the support units. We recognise that we have a role in that debate and we want to play it. That role is to exercise our stewardship of the economy and of Scotland's culture and to ensure that ministers at Westminster are fully aware of the role and importance of Scotland's regiments.

Murdo Fraser: On the arms plot, does the minister accept that the strength of the current single-battalion regimental system is that the regiment is treated as a family and that the families of those serving have strong social ties across the regiment? Does he also accept that the advantage of moving the regiment en masse is that the whole social network moves and people move with their friends? Does he further accept that, if we move to trickle posting, we will lose the social networks that make the regiments such powerful fighting units?

Lewis Macdonald: I can see the strength of that argument. However, Nicholas Soames and Peter Duncan at Westminster have said that they support the ending of the arms plot, so Murdo Fraser might want to talk to his colleagues at Westminster about which view his party wishes to take. The basis of the proposals is to end the arms plot and replace it with trickle posting, and the consequences of that would be as Murdo Fraser has indicated.

We want to ensure that the MOD ministers are aware of our views and those that are held in Scotland. That is why the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have, as John Swinney asked, made representations to the Ministry of Defence stressing the importance of the identities of all six of Scotland's regiments. We recognise that the MOD ministers will have decisions to take on those matters and we are keen that they should understand how significant those regiments are considered to be in Scotland.

I was interested to see the recent reports of the appearance of the Secretary of State for Defence before the Select Committee on Defence; I have also read his comments from the Westminster debate that was held a week or two ago. I was encouraged to see his view that the existing regiments might retain their identity even under a

slightly different regimental structure, but the key question of how that identity should be maintained remains on the table and requires to be settled.

Meeting closed at 18:13.

We recognise that modernisation and reform of the Army are issues for Westminster and that it would be negligent of the British Government ever to cease to consider how best the British Army should be organised, but we believe that the Army has gained great strength over the years from the regimental system as it is currently constituted and from the local and family loyalties that many members have mentioned. Therefore, we will continue to maintain the dialogue with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the views that have been expressed clearly in the Parliament are fully considered when final decisions are made.

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